

# Birchwood PRU

Brook Education Centre, Parkfield Road, Folkestone, CT19 5BY

**Inspection dates** 17–18 September 2013

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	<b>Requires improvement</b>	<b>3</b>
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because:

- Not all managers have a clear role in checking the quality of teaching. Consequently they do not always understand what needs to be improved.
- Some leaders, including members of the management committee, do not make enough use of information about students' achievement to ensure they are making the best possible progress.
- Students do not attend school regularly enough and are not always punctual to lessons.
- Students do not have enough opportunities to use their own initiative and study skills to learn on their own. Too little time in lessons is taken up with active learning activities. As a result, students' achievement is not yet good, with English being weaker than mathematics.
- The overall quality of teaching is not yet good. Teachers' feedback does not always show students how they can improve their work.
- There are too few opportunities for students, particularly the most able, to respond to searching questions and communicate their understanding as fully as possible.

### The school has the following strengths:

- Aspects of students' behaviour have improved since the last inspection and they are increasingly respectful towards each other and members of staff.
- The newly appointed headteacher has already made an impact by promoting a positive ethos and setting high expectations. He makes it very clear that he wants all students to achieve as well as they can.
- Students' progress is beginning to accelerate, as demonstrated by an increase in the proportion of students achieving five or more GCSE passes at A\* to G, including English and mathematics.

## Information about this inspection

- The inspectors visited eight lessons, five of which were observed jointly with senior leaders.
- Informal discussions were held with groups of learners, and included listening to students read.
- There were no submissions to the online questionnaire (Parent View). Inspectors took account of the school's own surveys of parents and carers. Returns from 12 questionnaires completed by staff were also considered.
- Meetings were held with a member of the management committee, a headteacher from a neighbouring academy, a senior improvement adviser from the local authority, the headteacher and senior and middle leaders. In addition, a telephone interview was conducted with the Chair of the Management Committee.
- The inspectors evaluated documentation, including information on the students' current progress, the curriculum, and development plans, as well as procedures and records on safeguarding, behaviour and attendance.

## Inspection team

David Scott, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Jackie Blount

Additional Inspector

## Information about this school

- Birchwood caters for up to 44 full-time places for students in Years 10 and 11 who are either at risk of being, or have been, permanently excluded from their mainstream schools.
- Birchwood operates on four sites, two of which are run by an alternative provider, South of England Foundation T/A Charlton Athletic Community Trust. During the course of the last academic year, 80 students were taught throughout the provision.
- Almost all students are of White British heritage, the large majority being boys.
- The proportion of students who are from minority ethnic heritages is well below average, as is the proportion of the students who speak English as an additional language or are at the early stages of learning English.
- All students are supported at school action plus.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium (additional government funding provided for students eligible for free school meals, those in care and those with a parent or carer in the armed services) is above average. The proportion of looked after students is very small and none of the students in the school are from service families.
- Just over 30% of students across the school are involved with the local Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) as a result of their behavioural needs.
- The provision works in partnership with many different bodies and organisations, including the local authority and the University of Greenwich.
- Following the local authority's review of pupil referral unit (PRU) provision across Kent, the future of the Birchwood provision for the academic year 2013/14 has been resolved. From April 2013, local schools assumed the management and leadership of PRUs. It has been decided that from September 2013 the Ashford part of this provision will be discontinued with full devolved funding passing to a management committee that will include a group of Shepway headteachers. During this time the staffing structure at Birchwood has been reconstituted and a new headteacher was appointed in September 2013.

## What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching so that all groups of students make at least good progress by:
  - enabling students to become more active learners through encouraging them to work on their own and allowing them time for discussion
  - providing more detailed feedback so that each student knows precisely how to improve
  - involving students more in lessons through opportunities to answer searching questions and make more rapid progress, particularly the most able.
- Strengthen further the impact of leadership at all levels, including governance, by:
  - ensuring that information on students' progress is recorded and analysed rigorously so that help, challenge and support can be quickly given where they are needed
  - ensuring that there is a clear monitoring role and training for managers so that all can contribute to improving the quality of teaching
  - improving rates of attendance and punctuality still further by working even more closely with parents and carers so that they have a thorough awareness of the importance of regular attendance.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils

### requires improvement

- Achievement requires improvement because too few students make rapid enough progress over time due to interruptions in their schooling, poor attendance and weaknesses in teaching.
- Progress by the end of Year 11 is beginning to accelerate. There has been a rising trend over the past year. Progress in mathematics is faster than in English. This has been as a result of training on improving the teaching of calculation, provided by the local authority. Students' progress in English is slower than in mathematics. Students' attainment remains below average in English and mathematics.
- In 2013, there was a 28 percentage point increase in students achieving five or more GCSE passes at A\* to G including in English and mathematics. This is a clear improvement on the previous year's performance.
- Most learners reach their target levels. Academic success and gains in their personal development provide a secure pathway for the vast majority of students. Almost all students leave with some form of accredited qualification, placement at college, apprenticeship or employment.
- Students who are eligible for pupil premium have made similar or better progress to other students in the school. Those boys eligible for this support made faster progress in mathematics than their peers. The school has ensured that any the gaps in achievement have narrowed and as a result, the attainment of eligible pupils in the school has risen to almost match that of their peers in English and mathematics.
- Students generally have poorly developed literacy skills when they arrive. They make steady progress in reading because of good opportunities to accelerate their skills through small-group and one-to-one support. Progress in writing is slower because teachers do not always reinforce spelling, punctuation and presentation skills across all subjects. However, progress in mathematics is faster, as observed in a mathematics lesson where students were accurately working out complex fractions.
- The majority of students study with an alternative provider. Their progress is similar to that of students in school and there are effective arrangements for checking their work, attendance, punctuality and behaviour.
- Since the last inspection, the number of available subjects has increased significantly. All students follow appropriate pathways, and in Year 11 are able to achieve accreditation in English, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT) as well as a range of academic and practical subjects.
- Achievement information on individual students shows that there is no significant variation between different groups. The school has been particularly successful in narrowing the gap between boys who are supported at school action plus and their peers nationally, by focusing on their individual requirements. One in four students are entered for GCSE examinations early and if they do not get an A or A\* grade they are allowed to continue to work to improve their grades until the end of Year 11. This serves to motivate them well and has a positive impact on their overall achievement.

### The quality of teaching

### requires improvement

- The quality of teaching is too variable. Not enough is consistently good to ensure all students make good progress in all classes and subjects.
- At times, staff do not use enough practical activities to exploit opportunities for students to work on their own and apply what they have learned previously. When tasks are dominated by

teacher-led activities and the teacher talks for too long, students have few opportunities to discuss their ideas and, as a result, progress slows and interest wanes.

- Where teaching is best, teachers use question and answer sessions well to check students' progress in grasping new skills, knowledge and understanding. However, this practice is not consistently applied across the school.
- Teachers' lack of confidence, particularly in teaching English, has meant that until recently students have made slower progress in this subject. Teachers now receive regular and effective training and this is beginning to have a positive impact on developing their skills.
- Teachers often miss opportunities, both in lessons and in marking, to provide feedback to students that emphasises the small steps they need to take to improve. As a consequence, students, particularly the most able, do not always have a clear idea of how to improve quickly.
- Students gain confidence in applying their literacy skills when they have the opportunity to engage in practical activity and discussion. This was well illustrated in a leisure and tourism lesson observed during the inspection where students working in small teams had to decide which key words and pictures of key landmarks were associated with a particular country, and then explain the reasons for their choices. Here, the teachers' skilful planning and enthusiasm for the subject ensured that students were thoroughly absorbed in their work, and as a result made good progress.
- The promotion of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness is woven into their daily lives. There are many opportunities for students to speak about their learning, how they are feeling and listen carefully to each other and reflect on the lives of people who are from different cultures and who have different beliefs.

## The behaviour and safety of pupils

## requires improvement

- Behaviour is not yet good because many students are not provided with sufficient opportunities to develop the necessary skills to take responsibility for their own learning, and are over-reliant on adults for guidance.
- Students arrive at Birchwood with a range of emotional and behavioural issues and although their behaviour is improving there are still lapses of concentration by a few students in some lessons, often linked to the slow pace of learning. While parents and carers are generally happy with their child's education, just under a quarter stated that their child did not enjoy school.
- In the past, the number of fixed-term exclusions has been too high. More recently they have declined rapidly and this reflects the introduction of the new behaviour policy and the increased range of strategies available to staff to prevent the escalation of poor behaviour. Positive comments in a recent student survey reflect their increasing enjoyment of school life.
- In lessons observed, students' attitudes to learning were generally positive and behaviour was mostly appropriate, demonstrating the success of the provision's drive to raise expectations. Around the centres and outreach locations, students usually behaved sensibly and were considerate to each other, although there was the occasional lapse and use of derogatory language. Nevertheless, during the inspection, in one centre there was some boisterous behaviour during change of lesson times, in part due to the design and age of the building. The school in conjunction with the local authority has commissioned a review of the health and safety of the ARC 25 site and is currently awaiting the findings of the report.
- During the summer term there was a marked improvement in the pride that examination students took in their provision and this was reflected in over 90% attendance and punctuality to their examinations. Despite this and other positive improvements, such as rewards programmes, personalised one-to-one support, and increased rigour in tracking systems, overall attendance still remains low. This is mainly because of a few persistent absentees whose pattern of

attendance and punctuality is very erratic, and is not always taken seriously by parents and carers. Nevertheless, in the main, students make vast improvements in their levels of attendance when compared with those at their previous schools.

- Considerable emphasis is made on keeping students safe, and projects on bullying and e-safety have taken place. As a result, students feel safe and have a good awareness of safety issues, and about the dangers of different forms of bullying, including homophobic name calling and the use of social media.

## The leadership and management

## require improvement

- In a very short period of time the headteacher has demonstrated through his personal warmth and determination a vision for the school which has created a welcoming and calm ethos. He is well supported by senior colleagues and despite a period of uncertainty the school has overcome a number staffing difficulties. Nevertheless, leadership and management require improvement because leaders have not yet secured teaching that is good enough to ensure that all students make the progress they are capable of.
- Upon arrival at the school all students are assessed in order to check their particular needs and arrange appropriate support, so that all learners are afforded an equal chance to learn. Senior leaders are careful to ensure all students are able to participate in all activities and that there is no discrimination.
- Systems for recording and collection of information about students' progress are improving and building a clear picture of how well different groups are achieving in each class. However, some leaders, including members of the management committee, do not make enough use of this information to ensure all students make the best possible progress.
- Arrangements for managing teachers' performance are in place, and only those teachers who meet the required high standards, as judged by the headteacher, are able to move up the salary scale. Where teaching requires improvement, teachers receive additional coaching, support and training.
- The school's monitoring arrangements involve informal classroom visits and formal lesson observations. The headteacher currently leads this process and is assisted by the senior team. However, not all managers are confident in their monitoring role and require further training in order to help them bring about improvements in the quality of teaching more rapidly.
- The school has worked well with the local authority following the reorganisation of PRU provision in the county. It has also received invaluable support, training and advice from the local authority's senior improvement adviser.

### ■ The governance of the school:

- Members of the newly formed management committee provide support for the headteacher and together ensure that the performance and salary progression of staff are monitored. The committee receives reports from the headteacher and the local authority's senior improvement adviser. However, members have not had sufficient involvement so far in asking searching questions so that they fully understand the issues, particularly information on students' progress and how it compares that in with similar settings. They are well informed about the quality of teaching, and there is a planned programme of visits arranged. Committee members have a good overview of the provision's financial resources to drive its priorities forward. This includes directing appropriate funds for students attracting the pupil premium to make sure that individual learners are supported and helped in lessons. However, the impact of strategies supported by this funding has not been evaluated. Full regard is given to the well-being and safety of students, many of whom are very vulnerable at this time of their lives; the Chair of the Management Committee and other

members have undergone specific training in budget delegation and the future leadership of pupil referral units. The headteacher has already taken steps to secure the management committee's full involvement in reviewing and evaluating the provision's journey to improvement.

## What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>



## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	135462
<b>Local authority</b>	Kent
<b>Inspection number</b>	426408

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

<b>Type of school</b>	Pupil referral unit
<b>School category</b>	Pupil referral unit
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	14–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	21
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The local authority
<b>Headteacher</b>	Danny Reeves
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	18–19 January 2012
<b>Telephone number</b>	01303 210162
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