

The Bridge Short Stay School

Dock Road, Northwich, Cheshire, CW9 5HJ

Inspection dates

4–5 June 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
	This inspection:	Requires improvement 3
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

- Students do not make good progress in all subjects because teaching is not yet consistently strong enough to enable most students to catch up quickly on lost ground.
- Teachers' questions do not always challenge students, including the most able, to think for themselves. Students rely too much on teachers to explain and prompt their answers.
- The targets set for students do not always relate closely to students' starting points. Expectations of the progress students can make are not consistent across both sites.
- Students with the lowest level of literacy skills do not improve their reading and writing quickly enough so they can achieve well in all subjects.
- A number of students do not attend well enough to achieve well and do not have positive attitudes to their learning.
- The behaviour of a minority of students delays time for learning and students make slower progress.
- Some students with medical needs are not sufficiently challenged to return to their mainstream school. They continue to be taught at home for long periods.
- Senior leaders, managers and governors lack effective systems to ensure they have accurate figures about teaching, students' progress and attendance. They cannot easily identify what needs to improve and what actions are needed. They have not ensured that teaching and achievement are good.

The school has the following strengths

- Most students who attend the school for shorter periods of time are well supported in managing their behaviour so they can return to a mainstream school.
- Some students, including some of the most able, achieve well as a result of the well-tailored and flexible opportunities offered.
- Students make rapid progress in their personal and social development because of skilled support from staff to manage their behaviour. Most say they feel safe and secure in school.
- The support for students with individual medical needs is very effective in enabling the majority to return to school.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited 14 teaching sessions taught by 10 members of staff. Three of the visits were made jointly by an inspector and the acting headteacher.
- Meetings were held with individual students, the Chair of the Management Committee, senior leaders, leaders of attendance and behaviour, members of staff and a representative of the local authority.
- Students' work in books and files in different subjects were scrutinised closely and students were heard reading in small groups and in individual teaching sessions.
- Inspectors took account of 20 staff questionnaires. There were no responses from parents to the online survey, Parent View, but inspectors took note of the views of parents from seven telephone calls to a range of parents, a telephone call to a school attended for part of each week by a very few Bridge students, and the school's records of parents' views.
- Inspectors visited both school sites, the church hall site, and visited students and staff during an activity at Earth Skills.
- Inspectors also looked at a range of the school's records, including the school's evaluation of its work, its plans for future development, policies, including policies related to safeguarding, records of attendance and behaviour, of students' progress where this was available, and records of the school's monitoring of teaching.

Inspection team

Nell Banfield, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Jane Holmes

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The Bridge Short Stay School provides education for students from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 4 who have been permanently excluded from mainstream schools or who are at risk of being permanently excluded, and for students with medical conditions that temporarily prevent them from attending school.
- The majority of students attend one of the two sites at The Bridge at First House in Northwich or at The Bridge at Appleton in Ellesmere Port. The majority of students with medical conditions are educated at home or at All Saint's Church Hall in Hoole. A small minority of students follow courses away from the school site at Reaseheath College and Earth Skills.
- Almost all students are supported at the school action plus stage of special educational needs. A very small number have a statement of special educational needs.
- Currently, just over a quarter of students are looked after by the local authority.
- Around a third of students currently attending the school are eligible for support from pupil premium funding, which is extra funding for those students known to be eligible for free school meals or are looked after by the local authority.
- All current students are of White British heritage.
- Most students arrive with a history of low attendance and some are disengaged from learning.
- Most students arrive at the school at times other than the usual times of admission to school.
- There are no Year 7 students currently attending the school so no Year 7 catch-up funding is received.
- The executive headteacher has been absent for a number of months and was absent at the time of the inspection. The leader of The Bridge at First House has been absent due to ill health for some time. The school is currently led by an acting headteacher who is also the leader of The Bridge at Appleton.
- A small number of teachers on both sites have been appointed recently.
- The school was established in September 2012 and has not been previously inspected.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching so students make good or better progress by:
 - ensuring teachers ask challenging questions that make students think more about their answers and explain them more fully
 - making sure that students get enough chances to show that they can get on with their work and learn on their own
 - using resources more skilfully to ensure those with the lowest literacy levels are helped to improve their reading skills more quickly
 - ensuring teachers' marking of students' written work provides guidance, so that students know what they need to do to improve.
- Improve the attendance and punctuality of the minority of students who do not attend regularly by:
 - analysing figures for the attendance and punctuality of groups of students over time so actions taken are directed at those who are persistently absent or persistently late
 - analysing the information on students who do not attend work placements regularly so that planning prevents irregular attendance or absence after the first few sessions.

■ Improve the behaviour of the minority of students who delay learning by:

- using the school's policy more consistently to manage behaviour so the learning of the majority can take place without interruption
- ensuring leaders consider additional actions to respond to behaviour which distracts others
- ensuring teachers seek to capture students' interest and attention in the earliest stage of learning so no time is wasted.

■ Improve the quality and impact of leadership by:

- ensuring checks on students' progress, attendance, punctuality and behaviour across all sites, clearly identify areas needing to improve
- ensuring the same data is accessible and shared across all sites
- sharing actions that prove to be effective in improving progress and attendance across all sites
- agreeing expectations for progress so targets set can be suitably challenging for students with similar needs and similar starting points
- increasing the number of students with medical needs who return to school as quickly as possible by maintaining close links with schools, and re-establishing attendance as quickly as is possible.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Students arrive at the school working at below-average standards because they have missed time at school or been excluded from school, so they have gaps in the learning. They have sometimes lost the habits of learning or not had regular experience of the rewards a sense of achievement brings, so they are not well prepared to tackle academic courses.
- Students with medical needs, including the most able students, prior to arriving at the school, have often not been able to concentrate on their learning or have been too anxious to attend school regularly. The majority begin to make rapid progress but a minority continue to be taught at home and express reluctance to return to their school.
- Not enough students who attend the school for longer periods of time increase their progress sufficiently to attain the standards of which they are capable. The progress of most students accelerates when they arrive but the progress slows for the few who do not return to mainstream school. Teaching is not always adjusted to sustain their initial engagement in learning, work is not presented in a way that continues to interest them, and they rely on the teacher too much for explanations.
- It was not possible to compare the progress of students supported by pupil premium funding with the progress of other students in the school, because progress is recorded in different ways for students attending different sites. However, the funding is spent on additional experiences to raise students' expectations of themselves. It is also spent on counselling, so they can resolve their anxieties and learn more positive ways of thinking, and on extra support. The majority have improved their personal and social skills, and their behaviour, and have been able to return to school successfully.
- The very few students in Key Stage 2 attend their main school for some of their time and the school uses the sports funding to support students in engaging regularly in sporting activities when in their main school.
- Expectations for progress are too variable across all sites so targets are set which are not always matched to students' starting points and needs. Students working from a higher starting point are sometimes set inappropriate targets for their learning which are too low, and given work that lacks challenge and so their progress is not good enough.
- The majority of the most able students make good progress because staff use their skills and support effectively so students quickly regain their interest in learning and recapture an eagerness to learn.
- Students read a variety of material regularly in tutor time, discuss what they have read so they are aware of current events, and practise their reading skills effectively. Although time is spent with individual students with weak reading skills, the materials used do not enable the students to improve their literacy skills rapidly.
- Around a third of students overall, many of whom attend The Bridge at Appleton, do not increase their attendance or punctuality sufficiently to improve their learning, despite the sensitive and skilled support given to them by staff, and their progress continues to be slow.
- The progress of students who attend courses away from the school site is good for those who sustain their placements. However, a few either attend intermittently or fail to attend after a few sessions, and make too little progress as a result.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teaching requires improvement because it does not enable the majority of students to make consistently good progress from their low starting points, particularly those who remain at the school for longer periods. This was evident in students' books where progress over almost three terms in English and science was steady for one student but slower for other students.

- As the majority attend The Bridge for a short time and quickly move on to mainstream school, it is difficult for inspectors to check how well teaching improves the progress of this group over time. During this short period of attendance, there is evidence of marked improvements in behaviour and attitudes to learning so students are ready to improve their rates of progress when they return to their mainstream school.
- Students' written work is often marked with positive comments. However, teachers do not always provide guidance on how to improve, such as short tasks to improve writing. As a result some students continue to make the same mistakes and rely too much on the teacher to continue to point them out.
- Students do not always have sufficient opportunities to reflect on or talk about what they are learning or to answer teacher's questions about what they have learned. As a result the teacher explains too much and some students can become bored because they do not have the opportunity to show what they can do by working on their own.
- When students sustain their interest and take pride in remembering what they have learned and make good progress. For example, in a cooking session for younger students, the boys were keen to work towards an award by making a number of progressively more difficult dishes. They answered questions about the weight and proportions of ingredients and used their mathematical skills well. They explained confidently what they were doing and why they were cooking that particular dish.
- The majority of teaching for students with medical needs is well tailored to address their needs. Skilful teaching in a drama session enabled students who lacked confidence in establishing good relationships, to role-play how they would withstand pressure to behave in a way they did not want to. They enjoyed exploring their own responses to a situation, observed how others responded, and developed confidence in situations they had found difficult in the past.
- Students are entered for examinations early if they can achieve their best grade and students who make exceptional progress will take some GCSE examinations a year early.
- The majority of students who follow courses away from the school site and sustain their placements are engaged by skilled teaching and suitable tasks, and make good progress as a result.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

requires improvement

- The behaviour of students requires improvement. The behaviour of most is good as they have confidence in the skill and commitment of staff to help them, for example, when they are angry, frustrated or upset. However, a small minority of students arrive at school late and refuse to go into lessons. Despite the calm management of their behaviour by staff, some do not engage in the learning planned. When learning is quickly adjusted, they eventually settle and most work well, although much time is wasted in this process.
- Not all teachers use the school's policy consistently to manage behaviour so the learning of the majority can take place without interruption. Not all seek to capture students' interest and attention in the earliest stage of learning so no time is wasted.
- The school's arrangements to keep students safe and secure are good. This includes regular communications between settings about students' attendance and progress to make sure the students attending courses away from the school site are safe.
- Students say they feel safe and well supervised in the school and always have staff close by who they can turn to if needed. All parents contacted spoke highly of the success of steps taken by staff to improve their child's behaviour and well-being. One parent said 'I've got my son back.'
- Students are well aware of risks in and outside school and the setting ensures they are clear about the dangers involved, for example, in misusing social networking sites and mobile phones. A safeguarding officer regularly visits the school to support any who may be unsure how to keep themselves safe. Students say bullying is rare and any incidents are promptly managed by staff.
- Most students improve their attendance on arrival at the school but not all sustain that

improvement. Too many students are persistently absent, or late, particularly from The Bridge at Appleton, so attendance overall, though in line with attendance for short stay schools nationally, is much lower than attendance in all schools nationally. It is too difficult to measure if it has improved, as attendance was recorded differently in the past. Actions taken have not had a significant impact on improving attendance and punctuality. The school does not analyse the attendance of groups of students across the school so cannot effectively target the support to improve.

- Most students who attend the school for a short period make good progress in their personal and social development. As a result most are able to sustain their place at their mainstream school. A mainstream school leader spoken to confirmed the improved grades, progress and behaviour for a student who had returned after a short time at the Bridge school.
- The number of students excluded from school has recently risen. This is due to the increased number of incidents, mostly related to a small minority of students who arrived recently and who needed time to settle and respond to the school's support.

The leadership and management requires improvement

- The acting headteacher and middle leaders have taken steps to begin to secure improvements in training for teachers, in rates of attendance and in the quality of education away from the school site. However, leadership requires improvement because leaders have not ensured that teaching has been strong enough to enable students to make rapid or consistent progress over time.
- Assessments are not stored in one effective system across the two sites. As a result leaders, managers and governors cannot check well enough on standards, progress and behaviour and see clearly what is working well and what needs improving. Though teachers measure the progress made by each student, they cannot compare the attainment and progress of groups of students to see if all are achieving equally well. Therefore school leaders are not able to ensure that all students have an equal opportunity to succeed.
- Many teachers and leaders work with staff on other sites, but the outcomes of joint work is not used well enough to improve teaching across both sites or to identify and share what works well in promoting high standards. The acting headteacher has taken steps to begin this process.
- Systems to manage the performance of teachers are in place and each teacher has targets to work towards to improve their practice. Leaders and managers recognise and reward better teaching that leads to better progress.
- Students' social, moral and spiritual development is strong, particularly for students with medical needs, as a result of the opportunities to explore better ways of behaving towards each other. Students at the Earth Skills provision, who work to improve the environment, develop social and communication skills and work well together, which prepares them well for the future. The school uses students' interests to develop cultural understanding. As a result of studying Manga style characters in art, one student has explored Japanese culture and is designing a kimono.
- A significant minority of staff expressed concern about senior leadership, as one leader now covers both centres. They think that the local authority has not recognised the impact of reduced leadership in managing the admission of several young people with challenging behaviour. However, the local authority has increased their support to the school in light of the absence of two key leaders. This is not yet targeted at the site experiencing the most challenging behaviour. Leaders might consider additional actions to respond to behaviour which distracts others.
- The school's curriculum meets the needs of the students. Every opportunity is used to match work to students' needs, interests and future career choices.
- The school's arrangements for safeguarding students and staff meet statutory requirements
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Members of the management committee have a good range of expertise. They understand what the school is doing well, how it is performing and have an increasing understanding of

what needs to improve. They know teaching could be stronger and that not enough has been done to make it effective or ensure all students with medical needs who are capable of returning to school do so. The Chair and members are determined to improve the quality of teaching. They understand that current systems for recording progress are not helping the school well enough to improve. They know that the school's work in supporting the return to mainstream schools of students at risk of not doing well is successful and valued in local schools. Members have supported leaders in managing the performance of staff, know about rewards and have terminated contracts where teaching is considered ineffective. They know how pupil premium funding is spent and have taken advice on how best to show its impact. They maintain a healthy budget.

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

Unique reference number	138450
Local authority	Cheshire West and Chester
Inspection number	439443

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

Type of school	Pupil referral unit
School category	Pupil referral unit
Age range of pupils	7–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	64
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mike Keenan
Headteacher	Louise Davey
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01606 271700
Fax number	-
Email address	enquiries@thebridge.cheshire.sch.uk

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