

# The Bridge School

Chadwick Road, Astmoor Industrial Estate, Runcorn, Cheshire, WA7 1PW

**Inspection dates** 27–28 January 2015

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

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

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

- While the pace of improvement has increased following the appointment of the current headteacher, changes are mostly at an early stage and at a point where positive impact on teaching and students' progress is just beginning to emerge.
- There has been limited good information on students' progress, which only recently has been put right.
- Over time, the management committee has lacked the detailed information on teaching and students' achievement to know the right questions to challenge the school's performance.
- Teaching does not have a good capacity to engage students who find learning more difficult than most. Their needs are not thoroughly understood and, as a result, their learning is not precisely planned.
- There is not enough systematic support in school and in alternative provision to improve the literacy skills of students who do not like to read regularly and write extensively.
- There is some inconsistent practice in the marking of students' work which is not helpful to them making better progress.
- Some students' behaviour requires improvement because their attitudes to learning are not as positive as they need to be for them to make good progress and achieve well. There is a minority of students whose attendance is poor.
- Not all students are making good progress from their starting points in their time at the school or in alternative provision. The students whose attendance is poor fail to make enough progress.
- The opportunities are limited for students to extend their knowledge and understanding of the different cultures and religions found in Britain.

### The school has the following strengths

- Leaders, managers and now the management committee are gaining an accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses in teaching and students' achievement which they are using to drive improvement.
- While few of the staff are permanent appointments, they work as a well-motivated and cohesive team. They are inspired by the headteacher's leadership and are rising to challenges and high expectations he and other leaders set.
- Teachers' good subject knowledge ensures students are well prepared to tackle and do well in their examinations.
- The curriculum is broad overall and it enables students to gain essential qualifications and be well prepared for leaving school. Its activities promote students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- There are good arrangements for keeping students safe and to help them understand how to stay safe.

## Information about this inspection

- The inspector together with the headteacher observed teaching and learning across the school.
- Teaching was observed in two of the centres providing alternative provision.
- Meetings were held with senior and middle leaders and teachers.
- Discussions took place with representatives of the school's management committee. There was also a discussion with a representative of the local authority.
- The inspector met with a group of pupils to hear their views of the school and their experiences of learning.
- The inspector looked at a range of school's documents including information on pupils' progress, the school's development plan, the school's own evaluation of its work. Policies and procedures for child protection and the safeguarding of pupils were scrutinised.
- There were insufficient responses to Ofsted's on-line questionnaire (Parent View) to enable the inspector to take account of parents' views. The inspector met with a small group of parents and considered the school's survey of parents' views. The views of staff who responded to the Ofsted questionnaire were examined.

## Inspection team

Alan Lemon, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- In September 2013 The Bridge School, which previously had been a pupil referral unit for students in Key Stage 3, took over the role of the Key Stage 4 Gateway pupil referral unit and now caters for students in both key stages.
- The current headteacher commenced work in September 2014. The school has entered a period of significant reorganisation. At present almost all of the staff including teachers, teaching assistants and students' keyworkers are temporary and recruited through supply agencies. Some permanent staff are absent with long-term illnesses.
- The recruitment of a permanent staff has just begun.
- Of the 44 students currently on roll, 34 attend full time on short-term stays. They have either been permanently excluded, at risk of exclusion or awaiting places in secondary schools. The remaining 10 students are dual registered with their secondary schools.
- The proportion of disadvantaged students, those supported through the pupil premium is well above average. The pupil premium is additional funding for those pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those who are looked after by the local authority.
- A well-above-average proportion of students have special educational needs related to their behavioural, social and emotional difficulties.
- Some Key Stage 3 students and most in Key Stage 4 are offered education at The Bridge School and/or through alternative provision from a number of providers. None of the providers are registered with the Department for Education as independent schools.
- The five alternative providers used by the school are Core Assets, the National Teaching and Advisory Service, SALT, Sports Works Merseyside LTD, and Springboard Education LTD.

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

- Improve the quality of teaching in the school and alternative provision so it is consistently good or better by:
  - ensuring students are helped and encouraged to further their skills in reading and writing and to make good use of these in all of their work
  - teachers using assessment to plan lessons which engage all students, encourage positive attitudes to learning and meet the needs of all students effectively
  - teachers setting work which is well matched to each students' point in learning
  - marking students' work consistently so that they know what they have done well and what needs to be improved.
- Improve the curriculum to provide a variety of opportunities for students to learn about the diversity of cultures and beliefs found in Britain and add to their preparation for life in modern Britain.
- Improve leadership and management by:
  - securing accurate data on students' progress in order to see where improvements are needed in achievement, teaching and the curriculum
  - intensifying efforts to further improve students' attendance.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

## Inspection judgements

### The leadership and management requires improvement

- The strategies of leaders, managers and the management committee to improve the school and move it to good stalled since its last inspection. Progress on improvement was adversely affected by changes in leadership and staffing at much the same time as the school took over what had been separate Key Stage 4 provision.
- Throughout this period the local authority has been at the side of the school supporting and ensuring it has maintained its capacity to meet students' needs. The local authority has a clear vision and strategy for its alternative provision which together with expert support has successfully kept the school on track.
- In the five months the headteacher has been at the school, his good leadership has re-ignited the drive for improvement. Leaders have a comprehensive and accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The headteacher is frank about shortcomings and he has initiated detailed improvement strategies which are now being relentlessly pursued.
- Currently, leaders are tackling everything that needs to be tackled but many of the improvements sought are at an early stage of development and impact is not immediately obvious in some instances.
- Over time there has been a lack of rigour in the use of data about students' progress. This is now being robustly tackled. A new system is being used drawing upon teachers' half-termly assessments of students' progress which are checked against challenging targets and the amount of progress expected to be made. This is beginning to give clear direction to teachers' work.
- There is clear evidence of pupil premium funding more recently being spent on initiatives appropriate to supporting disadvantaged pupils. Recent improvements in attendance and achievement point to positive impact but this has not been confirmed through the careful analysis of data.
- The high level of students' absence from school and alternative provision is being effectively dealt with using rewards for good attendance, attendance management plans and 'learning passports'. However, the attendance of some students it is still too low.
- A tier of strong middle leadership is developing well and is driving key parts of the school's work effectively, the improvement of teaching and attendance in particular. They ensure alternative providers have clear expectations for the quality of teaching and students' outcomes and they are checking these rigorously. The arrangements for safeguarding students meet requirements and are robustly managed.
- Keyworkers have new responsibilities focusing on improving students' behaviour and emotional well-being as well as helping and engaging the support of parents. This is starting to have good impact on students' commitment to the school and their attendance. Together with the rest of the staff team, they promote the school's policy on equal opportunities, good relations within and beyond the school community and ensure discrimination in all of its forms is robustly tackled.
- The thorough check on the quality of teaching focuses leaders and teachers on improving students' engagement in learning, matching work to their different points in learning, assessment and providing students with helpful marking. The positive impact of this focus is already evident in the better teaching in mathematics and in students' current achievement in the subject.
- As all of the teachers are temporary appointments, and, while they are well supervised, they are not engaged in a formal process of performance management.
- The curriculum offers students a breadth of work, particularly in English, mathematics and personal, social and health education. In Key Stage 4 students have access to a wide range of accredited courses at the school and with alternative providers. Careers guidance and work experience contribute well to students' plans and preparation for leaving school. At both key stages there is good provision for numeracy but in literacy it requires improvement in order to tackle many students' reluctance to read and write.
- Students benefit from the provision for their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development bringing improvements to behaviour, attitudes to learning and relationships. Cultural development lags behind as there are few opportunities for students to get to know and understand the different cultures and religions there are in Britain. In other respects, the curriculum and students' achievement prepare them well for life in modern Britain.
- **The governance of the school:**
  - The members of the management committee are starting to take an active role in supporting the school. For example, there has been a good contribution to ensuring the recently introduced checks on the quality of teaching are robust. However, the management committee's scope to challenge leaders over the work of the school has been limited by the paucity of data on students' performance and until lately the quality of teaching. As a result, they do not have a good record of giving robust support and challenge to leaders on issues such as students' attendance and progress as well as the quality of

teaching.

## The behaviour and safety of pupils

## requires improvement

### Behaviour

- The behaviour of students requires improvement. In a minority of cases, students' attendance is patchy and overall at a low level, reflecting their difficulty engaging with learning.
- Attendance is starting to improve as students who do not turn up to school every day are taken to task. The importance of not missing school has a high profile. This is having the right impact with students and their parents. Good attendance is rewarded and students with the best records are celebrated. As a result, they feel proud of their good attendance but improved attendance is also linked to their growing acceptance of what the school offers them.
- Most students' attitudes to learning are positive, having improved significantly. Some very much like school to the extent they return successfully to a mainstream secondary school. Many grow to cope with the demands of learning and making progress as a result of the intensive support and good relationships on which they thrive.
- Behaviour seen in lessons, around the school and in the alternative provision settings visited was good. The incidents of poor behaviour recorded indicate it is not consistently good although more recently the number of incidents are fewer and less serious than in the past.
- In lessons, most students settle down well, listen carefully to the teacher and obey instructions. They do the work asked of them and make good efforts with it. Mathematics work is methodical and neat. There is often less investment in presenting good writing.

### Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good.
- Good behaviour contributes significantly to the school's calm, welcoming atmosphere which reassures vulnerable students and helps all students feel safe.
- The nature of incidents recorded show that there is little antagonism between pupils. Their relationships are friendly and respectful. Conversations with students reveal they experience no bullying and records of bullying confirm incidents of harassment over time have been very few.
- Teachers and support staff manage behaviour effectively. They use their training in keeping students safe rigorously to raise concerns and leaders deal with these in line with their clearly articulated procedures.
- The curriculum provides students with a breadth of learning opportunities on risks and staying safe. They learn about bullying in all of its forms and matters such as exploitation, violence, offending and substance misuse. Members of organisations specialising in health and safety visit regularly to instruct on staying safe especially around the use of the internet and social media.
- Recently, two students attended a conference and gave a confident presentation on e-safety.

## The quality of teaching

## requires improvement

- Teaching is not consistently good and, as a result, students' progress over time has been uneven. While leaders understand the strengths and weaknesses of teaching they have not had enough time to drive improvement and move it to good.
- The fact that teachers are temporary appointments has not dampened leaders' determination to strengthen teaching right away. Leaders' high expectations and systems to bring and sustain better teaching are well advanced.
- Teachers have a good knowledge of the subjects they teach, including English and mathematics. This works well for most students and for those Key Stage 4 students in particular who are studying for GCSE and equivalent qualifications. They are well supported in learning the knowledge, skills and understanding to pass examinations and for the most able to achieve the higher grades.
- Assessment is effective in tracking progress in relation to examination courses but is limited in determining the causes of some students' learning difficulties. This prevents the planning of work which is well aimed at closing gaps some students have in learning. Help for students in overcoming their difficulties in literacy, to enjoy and be good at reading and writing, is not systematic enough. However, leaders have taken effective steps to remedy this.
- Students' engagement with mathematics is more positive. They learn well and make good progress as a

result of effective mathematics teaching in school and with alternative providers.

- An improved and rigorous marking policy is starting to be used and some good practice in telling students how well they have done and what can be improved is evident in their workbooks. However, marking is not consistently done well throughout the school.

### **The achievement of pupils**

### **requires improvement**

- While an antipathy towards school in general is typical of most students they have an underlying desire to do well and are concerned to achieve the knowledge, skills and qualifications needed for further education, training and employment. They are able to pursue this with success at this school and therefore aim confidently at gaining GCSEs and vocational qualifications.
- Students' behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, which represent their special educational needs, are effectively managed and improved, enabling students to settle and take advantage of their educational opportunities. This is consistent across the school and the centres offering alternative provision.
- In 2014, by the end of Key Stage 4 all students achieved well. The 18 students gained a total of 40 qualifications of which 16 were A\* to G GCSEs, including English, mathematics and science. Most of these academic and vocational examination courses were undertaken with alternative providers.
- Most students when they leave go into employment, further education or training and the checks made by the local authority show they sustain their places.
- Leaders are finding out more about students' starting points and their academic abilities. This year they have raised their expectations for progress, which is targeted at students making more than expected progress. The most able students are working for higher GCSE grades in more examinations and their work and assessments show they are on track to achieve these.
- Disadvantaged students make similar progress to other students in the school. No comparison can be made between their achievement and that of other students nationally because of the small numbers involved.
- Students are making good progress in mathematics in the school and in the alternative provision. Their good efforts in tackling challenging problems bring rapid gains in mathematical knowledge and skills. Less interest is taken in reading and writing tasks and therefore progress in literacy is slower.

## 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>	134321
<b>Local authority</b>	Halton
<b>Inspection number</b>	453672

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>	11–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	44
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The local authority
<b>Chair</b>	Mark Dennett
<b>Headteacher</b>	Nigel Hunt
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	31 January 2013
<b>Telephone number</b>	01928 581301
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