

Birchwood PRU

106 Cheriton Road, Folkestone, Kent CT20 2QN

Inspection dates

20–21 September 2016

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Although standards in many subjects are rising, some pupils do not make the progress expected of them.
- Some pupils continue to achieve lower than expected standards in English and as a result these pupils do not make enough progress in this important subject.
- In the past, leaders and managers have not evaluated the quality of teaching and learning with enough rigour, so staff training has not made enough of a difference.
- The processes to support the effective transfer of pupils from their previous schools are not well developed. Consequently, a few pupils are wrongly assessed when they arrive.
- There are too few opportunities for pupils to write at length so they are not well supported to achieve the standards they should.
- Although there has been support for improving teaching in the past, teachers are not yet planning effectively so that pupils with different starting points make the progress expected of them.
- A few pupils are not yet confident readers and although there are systems to address this, these are not yet well established.
- In the past, governors did not have enough accurate information about the progress of different groups of pupils in the provision.

The school has the following strengths

- The new headteacher has set out a compelling vision for the future, which all staff have adopted and are energetically working towards.
- Leaders and governors now have an accurate view of what is working well and a clear sense of what improvements still need to be made, especially in training and mentoring staff.
- Pupils enjoy attending the provision and gain a range of qualifications so that they all successfully move onto the next stage of education, employment and training.
- Pupils are polite, respectful and considerate. They work well with each other and with the staff so there is a purposeful learning environment.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching, learning and assessment by ensuring that:
 - teachers use prior attainment information more effectively to plan the learning for groups of pupils so that all pupils, but especially the most able, make stronger progress from their different starting points
 - pupils receive good guidance and support to write at length and read more widely so that they achieve higher standards in English at the end of key stage 4.
- Refine and strengthen leadership and management, by:
 - improving the quality of information shared by partner schools so that leaders have a more thorough overview of the abilities and unique barriers these pupils face
 - improving how leaders evaluate and analyse the progress of groups from their different starting points.
- Ensure that the school's website meets the government's requirements, especially by providing information about how the funding for disadvantaged pupils is spent.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- In the past, leaders did not have a strong overview of the progress that pupils made. Currently, there remain a few gaps in the quality of information received from partner schools so that the achievement information is not as robust as it needs to be. As a result, teachers are not yet able to assess a few pupils' progress accurately enough.
- While there has been some support for improving teaching in the past, some teaching requires improvement. The alternative provision manager of the Charlton Athletic Community Trust, who is responsible for all staff in the school, recognises that the systems to reward pay and performance are not yet sufficiently rigorous and linked to pupils' progress. However, staff are committed to improving their skills and are undertaking additional qualifications to achieve this.
- The headteacher is new to the school. He has an ambitious and aspirational vision for the future of the school and in a short space of time he has established a culture of high expectations for all. As a result, staff, pupils and parents are very positive about the provision.
- Since his appointment, the headteacher has effectively assessed the quality of the provision and established a credible plan to address the shortfalls, especially with assessment. As a result, staff are gaining confidence in assessing pupils' work and pupils are also responding well to the improved guidance they receive.
- The headteacher works effectively with other managers so that teachers across all of the three sites have the same expectations for pupils and the standards they are aiming for. Staff feel well supported and are proud to work in the school.
- The headteacher has reviewed the subjects that pupils study and made appropriate changes so that pupils are now taking subjects which are better suited to their interests and needs. As a result, pupils are more engaged in their lessons and focused on their futures because they are studying a wider range of qualifications than previously. Pupils also experience a broad range of resources that prepare them well for life in modern Britain. For example, a text, 'Pigeon English', is used to develop pupils' understanding of the challenges of being a migrant. Consequently, pupils are tolerant of those pupils who are from different ethnic, cultural or religious backgrounds.
- Currently, the provision receives no additional funding for pupils who are disadvantaged from the schools that it serves. However, leaders have a good overview of the progress that these pupils make and have established some strategies to support their attendance, such as a breakfast club. Leaders also carefully monitor pupils' attendance, especially the disadvantaged pupils, and take rapid action when pupils' attendance is less than good.
- The headteacher has introduced a new approach to managing behaviour which is based on mutual respect and restorative justice. Pupils have a good understanding of what is right and wrong and this is reflected in the good conduct seen across the school. Pupils also play a role in deciding on aspects of the reward system and take on leadership roles such as organising sports competitions.

- Parents are well informed of the progress that their child is making. There are regular meetings and written reports. Parents reported that their children were much happier now and working harder than in their previous schools.
- Local authority support has been increasingly effective. Since January 2016, the local authority has supported leaders and governors to check whether the progress of pupils in the school is above that of similar pupils in similar settings in Kent. The local authority has also provided useful expertise in supporting the governors to recruit a new headteacher as well as advise them on aspects of their role that they are required to carry out by law.

Governance of the school

- Governance requires improvement. The management committee has an accurate view of the weaknesses and strengths of the school. The management committee works effectively to ensure that the school's finances are sound and that they carry out their statutory responsibilities well. The members of the management committee are leaders from those schools that send pupils to the provision so have a good understanding of the needs of these pupils.
- The management committee receives regular reports on aspects of the provision and in the past has ensured that they independently check on the work of leaders. However, this practice is not sufficiently well developed and the management committee acknowledges that more external scrutiny is required more frequently to ensure that it can challenge leaders more effectively.
- The management committee is knowledgeable about the standards that pupils achieve but is less secure about the progress that pupils make because of weaknesses in the information shared with it in the past. It acknowledges that more needs to be done to ensure that pupils, including the disadvantaged and the most able, make more progress from their starting points. Members of the management committee are also aware of the need to improve standards in English and have started to support leaders to address this.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- There are appropriate systems in place to check on the recruitment of staff. All staff are suitably trained, including those with additional responsibilities, so that pupils are clear about what to do if they have any concerns. Those pupils who are vulnerable or in need of additional help are well supported because leaders make good use of local services to ensure that they receive the assistance they need. As a consequence, both pupils and parents report that when they have any concerns these are dealt with swiftly and appropriately and that leaders do all they can for the pupils in their care.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Teaching in English is not yet well developed. Teachers are using a range of strategies to promote reading and writing, but they are not yet sufficiently skilful in planning for pupils who have different starting points. A few pupils find the work easy and complete

written work set because they are not challenged to write at length, while others struggle to write even with the support available.

- There are systems in place to support pupils' reading. Most pupils read fluently and are able to use their reading skills to identify key points as well as understand the difference punctuation can make to the meaning of a sentence. However, a few pupils struggle with reading and are not yet supported to read more often so that they can improve.
- The most able pupils are not sufficiently stretched in lessons because occasionally they finish the work set too quickly. In the past, the information shared between the partner schools was not detailed enough so teachers were unaware of the potential of some of their pupils. Consequently, teachers did not plan sufficiently for these pupils and these pupils' books do not show that they are working at a high enough level.
- Where teaching is most effective, teachers plan well for the different needs of their pupils and ensure that pupils who need extra support receive it. Pupils talk about how much better they are doing in this school than others they attended because teachers and other adults know them well and encourage them to do their best.
- The teaching of mathematics is improving. Teachers make good use of assessment and plan effectively so that the majority of pupils make progress from their starting points. Pupils use calculators, rulers and other equipment well and are confident in explaining their thinking, for example by showing how complex decimal problems can be solved through steps and estimation.
- Teachers use their subject knowledge well to choose resources and activities that ensure pupils are engaged and stimulated. For example, in a geography lesson pupils discussed animatedly the various threats posed by earthquakes, tsunamis and volcanoes using vocabulary that was new to them.
- Pupils' misconceptions are swiftly managed by teachers. For example, in an English lesson the teacher skilfully addressed pupils' confusion over the difference between an author and a narrator. Pupils' work is assessed regularly and pupils receive useful guidance about what they need to do to improve. Pupils know what their targets are and take time to correct mistakes they have made.
- Teachers support those pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities well. Pupils receive extra support for reading, including a refresher course on spelling using phonics and individual support in mathematics. These pupils also follow a personal curriculum that includes qualifications that better meet their needs.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils enjoy coming to school and report that they appreciate that they are treated like young people. In lessons, they collaborate well and value the contribution of others. They are also curious about other cultures and enjoy finding out about different religious practices such as fasting during Ramadan. In their lessons they explore British values such as tolerance, democracy and the rule of law.

- Pupils are especially well supported to move onto the next stage of education or training. They receive detailed guidance on their future options through a programme of visits, work experience and guest speakers. As a result, all pupils spoken to by inspectors had a clear idea of what they wanted to do in the future and what next steps they needed to take to achieve their goals.
- There are extensive programmes to help pupils stay safe. The school works with a wide variety of organisations to provide relevant information on issues such as drug and alcohol misuse, sexual relationships and healthy lifestyles. The staff are also skilful in supporting the pupils to use social media safely and develop pupils' understanding of different forms of bullying, especially cyber bullying.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Many pupils make rapid improvements in their attitudes to learning.
- Pupils move calmly and purposefully around the three centres and follow instructions well. They enjoy each other's company and although they report that they 'occasionally fall out' they have learned how to manage their emotions well. They value their social time together, they take turns and are respectful of one another.
- Behaviour in lessons is good. The majority are keen to do well and contribute to class discussions confidently. Many volunteer to read or write on the board to share their ideas. They work happily with other pupils in groups or in pairs and are prepared to give their point of view without prompting.
- There have been no exclusions in the past year and very low rates of exclusion prior to this. Attendance was low in the past but is increasing rapidly, especially for those who have attended the centre for a longer period. Those pupils who have had poor attendance in the past attend more frequently than before because of the very extensive actions taken by leaders to support them.
- When there is disruption to learning, there are clear systems in place to manage this. Pupils and staff report that the new system of restorative justice works particularly effectively to resolve any issues that may occur.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Pupils often join the school with levels of attainment well below those typical for pupils of a similar age in mainstream schools. Many have a history of poor attendance or disrupted learning so that many pupils have considerable gaps in their knowledge. Frequently, when pupils start at the provision, they are disillusioned with learning and are negative about their futures.
- In 2016, fewer pupils than predicted made the progress expected of them in English. The additional support for these pupils did not have the impact that leaders predicted. Furthermore, the training and guidance for teachers to improve pupils' written skills was not focused enough to make a difference.
- In 2015, a third of all pupils achieved at least one C grade at GCSE level, although fewer pupils achieved a grade C in English or mathematics than the Kent average for pupils in similar settings. However, the majority of pupils did achieve at least 5 A* to G grades, which was above the local average.

- In 2016, a small minority of pupils achieved a grade C in English, although a quarter of pupils achieved this grade in mathematics. The vast majority of pupils also left the centre with five passes at GCSE in a variety of subjects.
- The majority of current disadvantaged pupils are making the progress expected of them and are on track to achieve a range of qualifications in line with their peers. However, the headteacher acknowledges that some of these pupils need to make more rapid progress to catch up and this is especially the case for the most able disadvantaged pupils.
- There are very few pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Those that have been identified prior to their arrival in Year 10 receive good support, with a personalised curriculum and useful targeted individual support. The new headteacher recognises that some information is not communicated effectively by the partner schools so some pupils' needs are not identified quickly enough.
- Pupils in 2016 made better progress in mathematics from the time they started in the centre and this was closer to the average for similar Kent schools. Leaders made good use of additional funding to support pupils with additional coaching for mathematics as well as improved guidance for teachers to improve teaching. Pupils enjoy developing their numeracy skills in mathematics and across other subjects because teachers use topical examples to illustrate everyday problems.
- Current information shows that those pupils who have been in the provision for some time are making better progress in mathematics and English. There is also good evidence that they are meeting their targets in their other subjects. The curriculum changes made by leaders and the subsequent focus on five subjects, including English and mathematics, have helped pupils to gain key skills and a range of qualifications.
- The few most able pupils who attend the centre gain good qualifications, including in English and mathematics. These pupils successfully move onto their next stage of education, training or employment. However, these pupils do not move onto study courses at the same level as similar pupils in mainstream schools.
- Over the past three years, all pupils have moved onto further education, employment or training, which is a proportion that is above the local and national average. They are well prepared for the next stage because leaders have ensured that pupils receive independent advice and guidance.

School details

Unique reference number	135462
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10002365

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	14–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	2
Appropriate authority	Local authority
Chair	
Headteacher	Warren Deane
Telephone number	01303 851187
Website	www.birchwoodpru.kent.sch.uk
Email address	office@birchwoodpru.kent.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	17–18 September 2013

Information about this school

- Birchwood Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) is an alternative provision school that works in partnership with six secondary schools in Shepway. Charlton Athletic Community Trust currently has the service level agreement to provide staff and contribute to the costs of the provision.
- The school offers support for up to 30 full-time pupils in key stage 4 who have been excluded, are at risk of permanent exclusion or who have become disengaged with learning.
- The majority of pupils remain at the centre to complete a range of qualifications and transfer to post 16-education or training. A few pupils in Year 10 stay up to a term before returning to mainstream education.
- Most pupils have experienced disruption to their education or have refused to attend school in the past.
- The majority of pupils are boys and most are of White British heritage.

- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is below the national average.
- The number of pupils who are disadvantaged and supported through the pupil premium is above average. However, the school does not receive the funding for those pupils who are dual registered. The vast majority are dual registered.
- A new headteacher was appointed in September 2016.
- The school does not meet the requirements on the publication of information about pupil premium funding on its website.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited a wide range of lessons taught by tutors and assistant tutors. Inspectors evaluated pupils' books in lessons and with senior leaders.
- Visits took place over all three sites.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, members of the management committee, middle leaders and staff.
- There were formal and informal discussions with pupils during and outside lessons.
- Inspectors spoke to a parent to consider their views as well as a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour around the school, at break and at lunch.
- The views of staff were gained from meetings and the five returns from the staff questionnaire.
- A wide range of documents were scrutinised. This included the school's records about the quality of teaching, pupils' progress, behaviour reports, safeguarding procedures, the school's self-evaluation and the school improvement plan.

Inspection team

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Her Majesty's Inspector

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Ofsted Inspector

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