

Inspection of a good school: Poplar Adolescent Unit

Rochford Hospital, Union Lane, Rochford, Essex, SS4 1RB

Inspection dates: 11 and 12 July 2023

Outcome

Poplar Adolescent Unit continues to be a good school. There is enough evidence of improved performance to suggest that the school could be judged outstanding if we were to carry out a graded (section 5) inspection now. The school's next inspection will be a graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils experience a safe haven that gives them hope for a different future. Their teachers provide opportunities to turn this hope into reality. They learn in a calm, friendly atmosphere in both the unit and the hospital ward. This is because of the warm relationships between staff and pupils. Staff are always patient and caring. Pupils see, hear and take part in polite and respectful conversations.

Pupils know that their path towards new knowledge and skills is never a path that they take alone. Staff are there for them every step of the way, keeping close watch over their well-being. Pupils make the kind of progress that, prior to joining the unit, may not have been possible. In addition to learning new knowledge and skills, pupils learn that success is possible, even in the face of adversity.

A carefully chosen range of activities, trips and visitors provides pupils with opportunities to build confidence, to find new coping strategies and to learn about risk. For every pupil, there are opportunities that bring out their personality and to enjoy being a teenager.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

The curriculum is broad and ambitious. It allows for a great deal of flexibility because pupils have often experienced disruption to their earlier education. Leaders quickly establish, through their own assessments and conversations with pupils' home schools, pupils' needs and capabilities. Leaders then work with key teachers to set out, in detail, pupils' individual education plans. These plans also take into account pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

Recent changes to timetables have increased the proportions of lessons taught by a subject specialist. Normally, lessons take place in the classrooms. However, staff seize all

the opportunities available to help pupils to learn, including when they are on the ward. Regular meetings between subject specialists and pupils' key teachers ensure that all lessons help pupils to build on what they know and can do.

Teachers skilfully motivate pupils to learn new knowledge and skills. They notice quickly if pupils need extra explanations and worked examples. On rare occasions, teachers do not provide enough opportunities to rehearse new knowledge. This is because leaders and teachers are still embedding new curriculum approaches. As a result, it takes slightly longer for pupils to learn and remember new concepts. However, pupils make remarkable progress. Many pupils successfully complete units of study and sit external examinations, such as GCSEs.

Staff model kindness and respect. They ensure that pupils are ready to learn. They work closely with medical professionals to ensure high levels of pastoral care. Pupils behave very well. They respond to adults' high expectations of their behaviour and learning.

Leaders have created a personal development programme that is closely aligned to pupils' needs. Pupils learn strategies to manage their mental health. Leaders adapt the personal, social and health education curriculum carefully. Visiting experts teach some aspects of this curriculum. This ensures that pupils learn about healthy relationships and healthy living in a way that is sensitive to their own experiences. Pupils learn about protected characteristics and they are encouraged to respect the views of others. Independent careers advice and guidance helps pupils to choose their next steps. This includes support for pupils who, prior to joining the unit, were not in education or training.

The headteacher has worked closely with members of the management committee to implement positive changes to pupils' educational experience. Leaders have provided a range of high-quality training opportunities to increase staff knowledge. This helps staff to better support pupils and to further their own careers. Staff speak warmly of the 'team ethos' and the way that it positively supports their well-being.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Frequent, planned opportunities for sharing important safeguarding information helps leaders and staff to support pupils' well-being in the unit. Leaders work closely with pupils' home schools and with the education providers that pupils will be joining after their time in the referral unit.

All adults know the additional risks that pupils face. Staff know the signs that indicate a pupil is at risk of harm and what to do if they have a concern. Pupils can share a worry with any adult. They learn how to keep safe, including online. Leaders and staff work closely with medical professionals to ensure that pupils are safeguarded both on and off site. Leaders have rigorous checks in place to verify the suitability of adults to work with pupils.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- On rare occasions, teachers do not provide enough opportunities for pupils to rehearse new knowledge. As a result, it takes slightly longer for pupils to learn and remember new concepts. Leaders should continue to train staff in how to adapt work set for pupils, so that pupils have sufficient purposeful practice.

Background

When we have judged good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called an ungraded inspection and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in October 2012.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	135778
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10211000
Type of school	Pupil referral unit
School category	Pupil referral unit
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	9
Appropriate authority	Local authority
Headteacher	Stephanie Yates
Website	www.poplaradolescentunit.essex.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	9 November 2016, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The unit is located within Rochford Hospital. Funding is through Essex Local Education Authority.
- Pupils are dual registered with their home schools or colleges.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the executive headteacher, the executive headteacher (designate), the head of school, subject leaders and key teachers.
- The lead inspector spoke with four members of the management committee.
- To gain an understanding of how information is shared, the lead inspector spoke with medical staff who work closely with staff at the referral unit. Inspectors also observed a ward handover meeting, and the lead inspector observed a multi-agency review meeting.
- The lead inspector spoke with, by telephone, a leader from a pupil's home school and with a representative from the local authority.

- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics and personal, social and health education. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers, looked at samples of pupils' work, and took into account the views of pupils.
- Inspectors spoke with leaders and staff to understand how workload and well-being are considered.
- To evaluate safeguarding procedures, the lead inspector met with the executive headteacher and the deputy safeguarding lead to discuss how safeguarding information is recorded and shared. The team inspector reviewed the unit's register of staff and regular visitors. Inspectors also spoke with staff and pupils.
- The lead inspector considered the responses made by parents to Ofsted Parent View, including parents' free-text responses. The lead inspector also considered six responses to Ofsted's survey for school staff.

Inspection team

Hannah Stoten, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Paul Wilson

His Majesty's Inspector

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