



The Northbrook PRU

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 131243
LEA Slough LEA
Inspection number 282184
Inspection dates 22 March 2006 to 23 March 2006
Reporting inspector Judith Charlesworth AI

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

Type of school	Special	School address	Haymill Site
School category	Pupil referral unit		112 Burnham Lane
Age range of pupils	11 to 16		Slough SL1 6LZ
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01628 696076
Number on roll	62	Fax number	01628 696080
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Gloria Walker
Date of previous inspection	8 May 2000	Headteacher	Jan Paine

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Northbrook is a complex Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) which falls under the remit of the Slough Alternative Education Service (AES) and caters for students aged 11 to 16 who have social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Northbrook comprises four of the AES' six separate centres. Three of the centres occupy parts of the Haymill community centre facilities and the fourth is in a separate building opposite a partner secondary school. Each centre works with pupils with differing needs which are met through a different type of curriculum. The centres are: PruPlus (Key Stages 3 and 4); Springboard (Key Stage 4); the Virtual School (Key Stages 3 and 4, for emotionally vulnerable students with mental health needs); and The Herschel Pupil Training Centre (HPTC) (20 day intensive courses for Key Stage 3 students in danger of exclusion from their mainstream schools). There are no teaching or learning support assistants. Instead, the PRU employs sports coach mentors who perform a variety of functions.

Most students have difficult family circumstances and long histories of professional intervention to address their needs; many are known to the police and other law-enforcing agencies. Most students have been excluded from mainstream schools and their education has been severely disrupted, and many experience learning difficulties as a result of their conduct disorder. There are currently 62 students on roll, three quarters of whom are from white British backgrounds with the remainder representing five ethnic groups. Nine students out of ten are boys.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This complex PRU offers outstanding provision. This is better than it judges itself. It is extremely well led and managed and provides excellent value for money. Self-evaluation is honest and effective in driving improvement. Since the last inspection, the PRU has improved and developed rapidly under the leadership of the new headteacher and its capacity for further improvement is excellent. Improvement has been supported by the development of a wide range of excellent links with community schools and organisations. The PRU now provides very well for students with a wide range of needs. Each centre is very well led and managed and staff form cohesive, effective teams, both in and across the centres. Overall, academic standards are broadly average but students' achievement is excellent because of their low social and personal starting points. Most achieve the standards of which they are individually capable, either in the PRU, or, for HPTC students, in their secondary schools. Students' personal development is good and they are very well prepared for employment, work or training when they leave the PRU.

The quality of teaching is good and students learn well as a result. Some of the teaching is excellent. Assessment of students' developing academic skills is well established but it is not always in a format that is easily analysed. The curriculum is excellent. It is different for each of the four groups of students and meets their needs extremely well. The afternoon curriculum for the Virtual School is extending along with the students' increasing ability to participate. However, supplementary activities are not yet put into a written programme. Some aspects of the practical curriculum in PruPlus are limited by the inadequate accommodation. Accredited learning is at the heart of the PRU's work which gives the students excellent opportunities for further education and employment.

What the school should do to improve further

- * Formalise the afternoon curriculum for the Virtual School.
- * Continue to work with the Local Authority to address the issue of inadequate accommodation for PruPlus.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

The students' academic achievement is outstanding. Most are admitted with no accurate information on their levels of attainment or after being out of school for a considerable time. The PRU's baseline assessment on entry reveals significant gaps in their learning. The great majority make excellent progress from this low starting point and achieve the standards of which they are individually capable. Overall, these are broadly average by the time students are 16 years old. National test results at age 14 are mostly a level below average, but nevertheless represent a great achievement from their low starting point. Students aged 14 - 16 years take a range of GCSE and equivalent courses.

Results are above the national average for PRUs. Last year, nearly half the students gained at least four GCSEs at A* - G, and half gained an A* - C grade in art and design. In almost all cases, students exceed initial predictions of attainment in GCSEs and other externally accredited courses.

The most significant factor, arising from an initial analysis of patterns of attainment and progress in different groups of students, is that the predicted grades of known substance-abusing students are well below those of the other students. The PRU has planned a suitable course of action to try and address this and so to improve standards and achievement further.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students' personal development is good. Most have a history of very poor school attendance and very difficult behaviour. Students' attendance in each centre of the PRU improves during their time there. In the HPTC, for example, attendance is often 100 per cent. Most students attend the Virtual School regularly, having previously been non-attendees or school-phobic. Attendance in the other two centres is more variable, but nevertheless improved. There are few exclusions and it is only used as a last resort when safety is at risk.

Students' attitude to their work is good. Before entry to the PRU, it was generally poor. The education offered at the PRU meets students' individual needs, so they re-engage with education and start to enjoy learning and their own success. When filing award certificates in her Record of Achievement, one student said that she could not believe she had achieved 'all this' and that she would have 'got nothing' if she had stayed in her previous school. Students become increasingly able to control themselves and accept the challenges and stresses of life. Practical work in science and design and technology is carried out with real interest and application in a relaxed and friendly working atmosphere. The intensive course at the HPTC is solely designed to improve students' personal development and does so successfully.

Students gain skills, knowledge and understanding for future economic well-being and almost all of last year's leavers are in employment, education or training. They learn to contribute back to the community through charitable activities and by developing consideration for others. Students understand the benefits of a healthy life-style and particularly enjoy sports-related activities. They are aware of the hazards of smoking, substance abuse and other key risks, however, some do not - or are unable to - choose the healthy option. The students understand how to stay safe, and often discuss aspects of their safety and well-being with staff - particularly the sports coach mentors. The students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Some of the teaching is outstanding and students behave, work and achieve as well as young people of their age in mainstream schools during these lessons. This very effective teaching has a clear purpose which the students understand. Their success is fed back to them immediately by marking in class and the PRU's reward system, which encourage them to persevere. Teachers use humour and a mixture of questioning, explanation and discussion which keeps students' interest and draws out and extends their knowledge and understanding. Resources are of good quality, relevant, interesting and well-prepared. The sports coach mentors support individuals discreetly and effectively. Some teaching does not demonstrate these qualities, although this generally applies to temporary, new or unqualified teachers. In particular, learning objectives are not always made clear and practical work is not carried out with a systematic approach. Provision for individuals' special needs is generally good because of careful lesson planning and well-constructed individual education plans.

Assessment of students' developing academic skills is well established and well used to plan for individual students' progress. It has a different format in each of the centres, appropriate to the type of curriculum offered. Although the assessments work well to give information on each individual student, it is not always easy to look at whole school issues in its current form.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is outstanding. Each centre has a different curriculum which meets the needs of its own group of students very well. The HPTC's aim is to help students reflect on themselves and their attitudes to learning in order to be able to stay in their mainstream schools. The Virtual School uses a commercial on-line teaching and learning programme which engages students who find groups and socialising difficult. It is supported by an increasing range of afternoon activities, but these are not yet formalised into a written programme. PruPlus follows the National Curriculum as closely as possible to support students' re-entry to mainstream school and is starting to offer accredited courses at Key Stage 4. Springboard is solely geared towards accredited learning through GCSE, vocational and other such courses.

Accreditation is central to the PRU's work because of the opportunities and self-esteem it gives the students. The curriculum is continually adjusted to enable more relevant accredited courses to be incorporated, such as those that can be built upon in college. Some aspects of the curriculum are limited by the premises for PruPlus. The accommodation is inadequate in size and layout and lacks suitable facilities for practical work. The PRU works creatively to overcome this as far as possible. Resources are adequate and improving all the time. The theft of a large number of computers has

delayed the complete implementation of a refreshed approach to teaching and learning in information and communication technology.

All students are offered work experience and/or off-site vocational courses. Sport plays a great part in the curriculum and is taught by the sports coach mentor team or external professionals such as a trampolining coach. This plays to the students' strengths and interests and promotes a healthy lifestyle and positive approach to the PRU and to learning. Each curriculum-type is enhanced by a wide range of additional activities which promote personal development, enrich subjects and prepare students for adult life.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The care, guidance and support given to students are excellent. Appropriate procedures are in place to assess risks and safeguard and promote students' well-being. The PRU gives all students the opportunity to develop personally and tackle the issues that led to their previous difficulties with education. Students are directed to a curriculum that most suits their needs and careful plans are made and targets set to help them make up for lost time and achieve as well as they can. Students are fully involved in planning and in evaluating their progress which teaches them to take responsibility for themselves. A number of practices work successfully to improve students' behaviour, attitude and attendance - and so their learning. The PRU involves parents as far as possible; their role is never under-estimated and the PRU regularly seeks their views on its own practice and on their children's progress. The sports coach mentors play a very valuable part in students' education and personal development. They gain students' confidence and respect and help them with self-management and learning. In addition, there is a very wide range of external professional links to support individuals both while at the PRU and after they leave. The great majority of students move on to further education, employment or training.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Leadership and management are outstanding. The PRU has developed dramatically since the last inspection under the expert leadership of the new headteacher. The capacity for further improvement is excellent and its leaders are currently seeking school status to help achieve this even more effectively. A crystal clear vision in which the students' needs are central, the confidence to be truly innovative, excellent strategic planning and the support of the Local Authority have combined to create an extremely effective resource that is highly valued by Slough secondary schools. The PRU has been instrumental in reducing the number of students out of school.

The management committee fulfils its responsibilities adequately and leadership and management are well dispersed through the PRU. The heads of centre create and lead effective professional teams, which operate very well both individually and together within the overall organisation. The sports coach mentors are influential and are

efficiently organised and supported. All staff provide excellent role models for the students. The headteacher provides consistent support and guidance for staff and students alike. Excellent consideration is given to the Every Child Matters agenda in the PRU's everyday practice, plans for development and students' reviews.

Staff performance is carefully managed and supported. Alongside other schools in the authority, the PRU suffers from difficulties in recruitment and is developing a small number of unqualified teachers through a well-conceived programme of coaching, mentoring and performance management. Quality assurance is central to the PRU's work. All aspects of its work are evaluated and stakeholders', including parents', views are regularly sought and used to underpin developments. Self-evaluation is honest and plans are put into place immediately any need for improvement is identified. The PRU has developed a wide range of excellent external links to support all aspects of its work, and financial resources are expertly and creatively gained and used to give outstanding value for money.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	1	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1	NA

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	NA
The behaviour of learners	2	NA
The attendance of learners	3	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	NA

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	NA

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	1	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	1	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Students

You may remember that I visited your school to see how well it was working and how well you were doing. I enjoyed talking to you and seeing you working so well in class and in other situations such as the Artastic enterprise. This helped me come to my conclusions about Northbrook, PruPlus, the Virtual School and the HPTC, and I'm sure you'll be pleased to hear that altogether, I think that the school is an excellent place.

First of all, I think that your behaviour is really good. You are friendly, helpful and work hard. Some of you were taking exams and your behaviour in the hall was excellent. It can't have been easy - I remember all too well!! I think that the school is very well run and Mrs Paine is an excellent leader. The staff care very much about what happens to you and they want to give you as much opportunity to succeed as possible. I have looked at the records kept of your personal targets and attendance and am delighted to see how they improve the longer you attend the school. I think that the sports coach mentors are a great help. Overall, I think that the subjects you study in each of the centres are excellent and suit you very well. The staff think all the time about how to make the things they give you to do even more interesting and relevant to your future. The new vocational courses that some of you are now working on is an example of this. I am really impressed with the exam results that you get and the number of you that go on to college and employment. Well done. It confirms my view that teaching is good and you learn well as a result.

I have suggested to Mrs Paine and the staff that they might do the following to improve the school further: firstly, to make written plans for the afternoon activities in the Virtual School and secondly, to work with Slough Local Authority to try and improve the accommodation for PruPlus. I don't think it's good enough for you at the moment. I wish you all the very best for your future.

Yours sincerely

Judith Charlesworth

Lead Inspector