



Merit Medical Pupil Referral Unit

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 134159
LEA Stoke-On-Trent
Inspection number 282474
Inspection dates 14 March 2006 to 14 March 2006
Reporting inspector Patricia Potheary AI

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

Type of school	Special	School address	The Mount
School category	Pupil referral unit		Mount Avenue Penkhull
Age range of pupils	4 to 16		Stoke-on-Trent ST4 7JU
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01782 236412
Number on roll	2	Fax number	01782 236222
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr Howard Cartilidge
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable	Headteacher	Mrs Julia McBride

Age group 4 to 16	Inspection dates 14 March 2006 - 14 March 2006	Inspection number 282474
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This is a pupil referral unit (PRU) which admits pupils who have medical needs that prevent them from attending school. Currently, a quarter of pupils have an illness or physical difficulty, a few are pregnant and two thirds have emotional or psychological difficulties. All but one pupil are aged 11 to 16 years and most are over 14. There are three centres open for three mornings a week. Each is attended by between seven and eleven pupils. In addition, there is a class in the local hospital which teaches up to five pupils for five mornings a week. Four pupils are taught at home for five hours a week. Most pupils remain at the unit from six weeks up to three years. All pupils are from White British backgrounds. The unit was opened in 2003 and this is its first inspection.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

The unit has a number of important strengths. However, it is not effective overall because it does not meet the educational needs of all pupils. This view matches that of the unit's leadership. Progress and achievement are inadequate. Although some pupils make satisfactory and even good progress in their work, this is not true for all of them. Those who have been at the unit the longest and those of higher abilities do not make enough progress. The unit provides a haven for the pupils in its care and is strongly appreciated by parents and pupils. It is particularly successful in helping pupils with emotional difficulties to regain their confidence, to want to attend and begin to learn. The unit also achieves good success in helping pupils reintegrate into their mainstream schools. The curriculum, however, does not offer sufficient courses to provide a broad balance of opportunities and the working week is too short. Pupils are cared for well but support to help them reach high standards is more limited. Leadership and management have been improved recently but do not yet gather the information necessary to ensure pupils do as well as they might. The unit's leadership is therefore unclear about where improvements are most needed. The management committee has played a limited role. It does not support the unit sufficiently well, or check to see how well pupils are doing. Consequently, leadership and management are inadequate. Value for money is also inadequate.

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the education act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that all pupils make sufficient progress in their lessons and courses and that this is fully monitored and evaluated.
- Improve the curriculum by increasing the breadth and quality of provision so that it meets the needs of all pupils.
- Ensure that the management committee holds the unit to account for its outcomes and acts as an advocate in seeking suitable provision for all pupils.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Although a minority of pupils make satisfactory or better progress, most do not and achievement is inadequate. Pupils who stay for short periods of time and have average or below average ability often make satisfactory and sometimes good progress in the subjects taught. This is because their work is linked closely to that from their mainstream school. Most, but not all, of these pupils achieve satisfactorily in national tests and GCSE examinations when they return to their school. Progress for all pupils attending the hospital class is good for the same reason. For the two thirds of pupils who stay for longer and for more-able pupils, progress is too slow and achievement

is inadequate. This is because work is not linked sufficiently well to what individual pupils have learned before and often lacks challenge. Pupils are also unable to follow enough courses to show the full extent of their ability. Many pupils are on track to achieve Entry Level qualifications this year, and although this represents satisfactory or even good progress for some, it does not provide the challenge necessary for all pupils to achieve well enough.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development and well-being are a key strength of the provision. The unit helps pupils with phobias and anxiety-related difficulties to find the confidence to want to attend and begin to enjoy learning again. Many of them have been out of school for some time and the centre acts as a sanctuary and new beginning, which parents and pupils appreciate very much. In addition, about 30 pupils a year successfully return to their mainstream schools, many having maintained their confidence and sense of normality during an illness. Most pupils in Year 11 are successfully able to undertake work experience and then go on to college when they leave, representing very good personal development. Pupils are very positive about their experiences describing Merit as 'the best place ever'. Many pupils said that they would like to stay longer each week if they could. They particularly feel that they are able to concentrate and do more work than in their previous schools. Their behaviour is excellent. Attendance is similar to that in other PRUs, and represents a significant improvement for many pupils.

About 12 pupils each week attend the optional Friday morning sports session and understand the importance of maintaining a healthy lifestyle. In addition, pupils act very safely, there is no bullying and they learn how to avoid drugs. Pupils contribute to the unit and the wider community well by helping out during break times, taking part in charity events such as comic relief day and showing very good concern and care for each other. The main teaching room in the Blurton centre has been very attractively decorated with murals by the pupils. Pupils develop several skills towards their future work, but these are inadequate because those who stay the longest have no time to develop enterprise skills and very little opportunity for taking vocational options.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. Much is done to extend their understanding in all lessons, although this is not planned systematically. In one excellent science lesson, the pupils were full of amazement at the complexity of flowers under the microscope and they clearly develop a respect and appreciation for opinions and values that are different from their own.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 4

The quality of teaching and learning is inadequate overall, although teaching has a variety of strengths. For example, the relationships between pupils and teachers are excellent, leading to a strong sense of motivation in the pupils to do well. The main difficulty lies in the lack of assessment and planning to make sure that lessons meet all the different needs of pupils. This means that significant groups of pupils do not make sufficient progress based upon what they have learned before. In most groups, pupils' ages range from 11 to 16, but often the same subject matter is taught at the same level and does not build learning according to individual needs. In the hospital class, learning does meet pupils' individual needs well, and, in the group where attainment levels are similar, then pupils often progress more successfully. In some lessons, pupils are able to learn at levels which suit them individually, particularly in mathematics. In others, however, work lacks challenge or teachers cannot teach to so many different levels of ability and meet course work requirements in the time. Despite this, many lessons are thoroughly engaging and fast paced. All teachers understand their subjects well and work skilfully to help pupils grasp what is being taught.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 4

The curriculum does not meet the needs of learners because it is too narrow and is offered for too few hours in the week. The head of the unit has successfully developed a core curriculum of English, mathematics, science and personal, social and health education, which is the minimum requirement. This has recently been timetabled to make it more consistent between the four centres but does not fully ensure that pupils progress systematically from one year to the next. Staff occasionally help pupils follow other courses at college so that they can follow their special interests. For short periods, where pupils are unwell, the curriculum meets their needs. However, for many pupils, there is not enough time to follow their interests, enable them to explore the creative arts, design and technology, the humanities or vocational studies and enterprise. When not at the unit, most pupils simply remain at home.

The curriculum is enriched by termly visits and visitors. This is satisfactory considering the short week and recently included a science day, several artistic activities, a theatre production and a visit to understand the conservation of Barbary Macaque monkeys. The personal, social and health education programme also helps to provide pupils with a sound understanding of how to stay safe and keep healthy.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

There are formal, effective procedures in place to ensure that pupils are well protected and cared for while they are at the unit. Staff are well trained so that there is very

good supervision of pupils to keep them safe and to look after their medical and emotional needs.

The staff are particularly successful in helping pupils develop personally and to learn to value themselves. However, the guidance to help pupils reach high academic standards is weak. There are suitable reviews and personal and subject targets set regularly which are discussed with pupils and parents. Despite this, the progress each pupil makes is not tracked sufficiently well. This means that pupils and staff do not have the information they need to aim for higher achievements where it is appropriate. Pupils receive good advice on what courses to take and where to go after leaving Merit.

Leadership and management

Grade: 4

Leadership and management are inadequate because, until recently, the PRU has not been directed sufficiently well to ensure that provision is suitable and that pupils reach high enough standards. Day to day, the unit is well run and is attractively maintained. Liaison with other schools and agencies is particularly effective in helping a high number of pupils reintegrate into their local schools or colleges successfully. The head of the unit, who has been solely in charge since September, has made several key improvements in a short time, including improving the curriculum, raising expectations, and improving resources and premises for two of the centres. The unit has developed significantly since it was the home tuition service, but this has not yet been enough to ensure pupils' needs are fully met.

Self-evaluation is not adequate to measure how well pupils are doing or to determine where improvements are needed. Parents' involvement in the unit's self-evaluation is limited to termly reviews and there is no overall gathering of views to help demonstrate where improvements are needed. This is recognised by leadership as a key area for development.

The unit does not provide equal opportunities in terms of the curriculum, especially for those who cannot be reintegrated into their mainstream school, or for those being taught at home while they wait for a place at Merit.

Staffing has several limitations. Currently, there is a team of experienced part-time teachers but some are temporary. Also, there are no teaching assistants to support any pupils with statements or to support pupils in lessons where there are many different needs. Staffing is too limited to support increased re-integration and reduce the large number of pupils who remain at Merit for more than a year.

Accommodation is not entirely suitable, although much of it is comfortable and attractive. In one centre, the main room is too small and in another, work cannot be displayed. Also, there are no specialist rooms, not even for science, and many resources have to be brought into the centres each day.

The management committee contains experienced and committed people who know how to improve the unit. However, their role up to now has not been adequate to

ensure that provision is meeting pupils' needs or in ensuring that they make enough progress. For example, the long-term placement of pupils at Merit who cannot be reintegrated into their mainstream school was not foreseen and has not been addressed. The management committee do not yet act as advocates to help bring about the necessary improvements to the unit.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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?	4	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	4	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	No	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	NA	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	4	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	3	NA
The behaviour of learners	1	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	3	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	4	NA

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	4	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	4	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3	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?	4	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	4	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	4	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	4	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	4	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	4	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	No
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	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you for being so helpful to me when I visited Merit; I enjoyed the time I spent with you very much. I can see why you are so happy there. I also enjoyed meeting your teachers and seeing you at work.

Highlights of your school:

- How interesting and enjoyable your lessons are and how hard you work.
- The progress you make in some lessons and courses.
- How you grow in confidence and want to do well.
- The responsible way you behave and how you help each other.
- The kind way the staff look after you and keep you safe.

What could be better:

- How much progress you make in lessons and how staff measure your progress to decide how to help you even more.
- The amount of time you can spend at Merit to give you more opportunities to take more courses when you are ready.
- The way the management committee helps Merit to develop