



The Bridge School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 134321
Local Authority Halton
Inspection number 282551
Inspection date 22 November 2006
Reporting inspector Frank Carruthers

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

Type of school	Pupil referral unit	School address	Grangeway Community Centre
School category	Pupil referral unit		Grangeway, Runcorn
Age range of pupils	11–14		Cheshire WA7 5HA
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01928 581301
Number on roll (school)	7	Fax number	01928 581306
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr Jonathon Potter
		Headteacher	Miss Wendy Birch
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected		

Age group	Inspection date	Inspection number
11–14	22 November 2006	282551

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This pupil referral unit (PRU) was created five years ago for students aged 11 to 14 excluded from mainstream schools because of significant behavioural problems. The unit can take up to 24 students and most of the current roll started during the present term. Most are White British and a few have statements of special educational needs for learning and sensory difficulties. Most have significant barriers to their learning, including high levels of social and economic disadvantage. A minority of students are in public care. Their attainment on entry is below average, often caused by gaps in their learning through absence from previous schools. The unit is based at a community centre but is moving to different premises with more facilities in the Spring term 2007.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The Bridge School is providing a good education and is achieving its aim of successfully re-integrating into mainstream education, students who have been permanently excluded from secondary schools during Key Stage 3.

The students' attendance, behaviour and attitudes to learning improve well and most return to secondary schools within two or three terms. While at the unit their achievement is good. By the time they begin the process of returning to secondary schools most are working at levels similar to those of their mainstream peers. A few move on to the adjacent Key Stage 4 PRU as they start in Year 10.

The good progress students make in both their personal development, for instance their social development, their awareness of a healthy and fit lifestyle and citizenship, and their academic development is the result partly of the good quality curriculum. The care, guidance and support given to students promote their well-being effectively. Positive links with outside agencies and schools help the progress of the students, who benefit from a curriculum that covers English, mathematics, science and information and communication technology (ICT), as well as opportunities in creative subjects, such as art and food technology, and personal, social, health and citizenship education. Students are taught well and the learning of average and higher attaining students is good. This is because of the high expectations of staff, setting the students challenging work and motivating them to try their best. However, a few students who have learning difficulties, for instance, in skills of reading or basic numeracy, achieve only satisfactorily and this is because teaching is not always geared to their needs.

Leadership by the headteacher is good. The unit is clear about its strengths and what else needs to be done to improve. It has good capacity to build on its current position. The appointment of a deputy headteacher and other permanent members of staff have bolstered the work of the unit in recent terms. The local authority maintains a good overview of the work of the unit and the responsible officer has close and regular contact with the headteacher and staff. However, there is no wider representation from schools and agencies to call on, to support the work of the PRU and hold it accountable. The unit gives satisfactory rather than good value for money because the cost of educating a student at the unit is high when compared to costs in other PRUs or special schools. It has yet to function fully as a facility that reaches out to schools in order to try to pre-empt exclusions. As a result, there is more it can achieve in terms of value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve standards and achievement for lower attaining students, particularly in reading and numeracy.
- Increase the involvement and representation of schools and support agencies in the overall management of the unit.
- Develop the wider role of the unit so that it supports schools in the drive to reduce the overall rate of exclusion from schools.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

The achievement of most students is good. The very large majority of those who took national tests at the end of Year 9 in 2006 reached levels similar to their mainstream peers. However, the very small numbers of students with learning difficulties in literacy and numeracy have big gaps in their previous learning. Their rate of progress is slower than the majority because their needs are not being fully met. Students achieve well in accredited qualifications, such as in food technology, as well as ICT and art. They have good opportunities to take part and achieve well in physical activities. Their overall good achievement is triggered by the high expectations of staff and leads to most students returning to mainstream schools on a level with their peers and so raise their future chances of success.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Based upon levels at their previous schools, students' attendance and attitudes to learning improve significantly while at the unit. They become satisfactory overall. The students are encouraged to be independent. For example, they are not transported to and from the unit each day; instead they are expected to use bus passes and be responsible for their own attendance. This has proved successful. The students learn good habits of punctuality. Their behaviour improves, being satisfactory overall. There are, however, examples of students behaving in a confrontational or aggressive manner but these are handled well by the unit staff and exclusions have fallen significantly in recent terms. Students learn well how to cooperate with one another in activities and about citizenship and rights and responsibilities, for example, when they had a representative in the UK Youth Elections. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development improves as their self-esteem rises and is good. They gain a better awareness of personal safety and a healthy and fit lifestyle through the quality of the curriculum. All these aspects go towards improving their personal development and economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The key strengths of the teaching are the relationships that build between students and staff, so that the students grow in confidence and self-esteem and take a greater pride in what they can do. As one student commented, 'The teachers don't go back over what you've done wrong in your last school.' Staff have high expectations for the students and time is set aside each day for students to talk with their tutor or the learning mentor about any problems they have. These discussions help teachers to plan well for the individual learning needs of students, though too much is sometimes

expected of the very small number of students who have difficulties with reading and numeracy. Teaching sessions are at times too long for these students who get tired and the tasks become too burdensome. Staff mark students' work conscientiously with a close eye on how they are achieving their targets and what are the next steps to improve. They take a pride in the work of students and show it off very effectively in stimulating displays that raise the students' self-esteem.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Through very good use of the specialist expertise of the staff, the unit offers a good range of subjects for students. Core subjects of English, mathematics and science are covered well. When necessary, staff also draw upon facilities in schools, for example, to carry out science investigations. Resources for ICT are good and personal computers are readily available for students to use. Students who find difficulty with writing are encouraged to present their work well using these facilities.

Personal, social, health and citizenship education makes a good contribution to the students' personal and emotional development. The unit also supports students successfully through programmes designed to relax, calm and reinvigorate them. Indoor leisure activities during lunch breaks are an integral part of the effective programme for rewarding students' good behaviour and effort.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

All procedures for child protection, health, safety and the safe recruitment of staff are in place. Staff are successful in providing students with opportunities to be independent and responsible for their actions, while at the same time maintaining a secure environment for them. Continuous good quality advice and guidance are provided to students and their parents or carers about students' progress, targets to meet, and future options. Parents and carers are partners in the process. Their views are sought and acted upon in the same way as professionals. Secure planning for each student is based on an effective system of assessing students' mental and emotional well-being. This means that staff gain insight into how the student sees himself or herself and where any anxieties lie.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher has successfully raised the profile of the work of the PRU and broadened the range of learning opportunities available for students. Staffing levels have been increased, including the recent appointment of a deputy headteacher. Also a thorough review of the unit has led to establishing it as a permanent part of the local authority's provision for students who become excluded from mainstream schools.

Parents and carers value its work and say it is an 'excellent interim form of education for young people excluded from mainstream schools.'

Procedures to evaluate how well the unit is performing are good and as a result, the views of senior managers match exactly the findings of this inspection. Monitoring and evaluating the quality of the provision, including teaching, are also effective and have pinpointed weaknesses that have been addressed through good quality professional development of staff.

Nevertheless, there is more to do for the unit to function to its full potential. The unit is currently focusing on students who have become permanently excluded from schools but there is a gap in the borough's support for students in danger of being excluded. So far the unit's 'outreach' service has had only limited impact. The responsible officer is aware of this and sees the forthcoming move to better facilities as a good opportunity for the unit to expand its role, make a greater impact on rates of exclusion and to provide better value for money. In addition, schools that make use of the services of the PRU do not have representation on its management structure and are not fully involved in its development. This again is an aspect the PRU is keen to develop that would confirm the unit's role within local authority provision.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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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?	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

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

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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

I am writing to let you know the outcome of the inspection of the unit. I enjoyed my visit very much. Most of you have only recently started at the unit so you are just getting used to things. The Bridge School is providing you with a good education and the staff are offering you much that will help you in the future.

- The headteacher and staff are giving you lots of help and guidance to make you successful.
- They are teaching you well and giving you the chance to keep up with vital studies in English, mathematics, science and ICT.
- Relationships between yourselves and staff are a key strength.
- You have good opportunities to enjoy courses in food technology, art and physical activities.

Talking to you and reading the comments from your parents and carers, I can see that you appreciate what the unit is doing for you. There are limitations to the rooms that you use in the community centre and there are very good plans to move soon to better premises. What the staff need to do next is to:

- make sure those of you who find it hard to read and understand basic numeracy work do better
- do more to help other students in secondary schools so they avoid being permanently excluded from school
- give headteachers of secondary schools in Runcorn and Widnes more opportunities to be involved in how the unit develops.