

# Alternative Curriculum 14-19

Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	131066
<b>Local Authority</b>	West Berkshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	293698
<b>Inspection dates</b>	10–11 July 2007
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	William Geoffrey Robson

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Pupil referral unit
<b>School category</b>	Pupil referral unit
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	14–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	19
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The local authority
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Jacque Davies
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>School address</b>	88 Newtown Road Newbury Berkshire RG14 7BT
<b>Telephone number</b>	01635 49397
<b>Fax number</b>	01635 36124

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<b>Age group</b>	14-16
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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

## Description of the school

Alternative Curriculum 14 - 19 was first registered as a pupil referral unit (PRU) in September 2005 and has not previously been inspected. It is based at two sites, Bridgeway and Badger's Hill, which are approximately twenty miles apart. It provides for students with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, the majority of whom have either been permanently excluded from mainstream schools or are at risk of permanent exclusion. A few have refused to attend school in the past and are taught at the PRU as a first step to returning to full time education. Although the unit provides primarily for students in Years 10 and 11, during the inspection three students in Year 9 were attending, to ease their transition into the unit next year. It also caters for a small number of post-16 students but none were on roll at the time of the inspection. Two students have statements of special educational need and there are three looked after children. The great majority are of White British origin and there are slightly more boys than girls.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

The Alternative Curriculum 14-19 PRU provides a good education for its students. It benefits from very good leadership, which has enabled the successful amalgamation of two separate units. Staff share a common vision for supporting students who have had severe difficulties in mainstream schools. Parents and carers appreciate this. One wrote, 'The school works hard with other professionals. I have been so pleased with the dedication shown by them towards my foster daughter'. This dedication is seen in the teachers' perseverance and determination to establish excellent relationships with students. It forms the basis for good teaching and learning and enables students to enjoy lessons, sometimes for the first time that they can remember. As a result, they make good progress over time. Although standards remain below the national average, students achieve well. Those who attend regularly gain several GCSE passes - much better than had been predicted at their mainstream school.

Good links with support agencies and a varied, well organised curriculum also enable students to develop well, personally and socially. Because they trust staff and enjoy the range of courses provided for them, students' attitudes, behaviour and attendance improve significantly. Students develop healthy lifestyles. They increase their understanding of the dangers of drugs, unsafe sex and careless driving through personal, health and social education. They eat healthy food, take advantage of good opportunities for sport and outdoor pursuits and follow the unit's no smoking policy. Students contribute willingly to local charities and are able to share their views with staff during daily briefings. However, they have limited opportunities to take responsibility in the unit itself. For example, there is no students' council. They respond well to a system of rewards for improving their general behaviour but are not made aware enough of the personal targets in their individual education plans. These targets are not precise enough, either for students' academic work or their personal development. Students' development of the skills necessary for working life is satisfactory. However, links with post-16 institutions are too limited to ensure the smooth transition to further education, training or employment for some students.

The PRU's good track record of development since its formation in 2005, its good leadership and teamwork, mean that it has good capacity for further improvement. Procedures for self-evaluation are satisfactory and involve all staff. However, data about students' progress is not yet used to evaluate the unit's work as precisely as it could be. The PRU is an expensive resource, especially as the two sites are twenty miles apart. However, its success in enabling previously disaffected students to continue with their education and make good progress means that it provides good value for money.

### What the school should do to improve further

- Set and share with students more precise targets for improving their work and for their personal development.
- Develop the collection and use of data to evaluate the PRU's work more precisely.
- Develop stronger links with local colleges, training providers and employers, to enable a smoother transition to post-16 provision and employment.

## Achievement and standards

### Grade: 2

Most students enter the unit with very low standards because of difficulties they have experienced in mainstream schools. Many have frequently been excluded before attending the

PRU, therefore missing a lot of their education, including National Curriculum tests in Year 9. Despite this, students begin to make good progress, especially when they attend regularly. In 2006, all gained at least one GCSE pass and over one third left with five or more passes, including English, mathematics and science. Several Year 10 students gained entry level qualifications because of the PRU's policy of enabling them to experience success as soon as possible. Current standards are similar. Although they remain low by comparison with national figures, they represent good achievement for students who had little prospect of gaining nationally recognised qualifications at their previous schools. Students with special educational needs and children in local authority care make similarly good progress.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 2**

Students' personal development and well-being are good, especially in view of the severe difficulties that they have previously experienced. They feel very safe in the unit as there is little bullying and they clearly trust teachers and support staff. Their more positive attitudes and increasing enjoyment of education are shown by their attendance, which improves significantly by comparison with their time in mainstream schools. Some still display challenging behaviour at times but begin to control their emotions successfully. This is one sign of students' good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. They grow sufficiently in confidence to support and trust one another. This is particularly evident in the success they experience during outdoor pursuits such as canoeing and rock climbing. The PRU's success in enabling students to come to terms with their social, emotional and behavioural difficulties provides a firm basis for their improved academic achievement.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 2**

The good quality of teaching and learning is based on the excellent relationships that teachers and support staff establish with students. They are well aware of students' needs and this enables them to manage any challenging behaviour very well. Students quickly realise that teachers have their best interests at heart and say, 'They have time for you here and always try to help you'. Teachers and support staff work very well together to keep students engaged. They make excellent use of praise to boost students' confidence at every opportunity. They provide clear explanations when students have difficulty understanding their work. In the best lessons they plan a variety of activities that grab students' attention. For example, in an English lesson, good use was made of an emotive film publicising cruelty to children. Students empathised with the situation and good questioning helped them to understand the media's use of persuasive techniques. Although this aspect of planning is good, teachers do not share lesson objectives sufficiently with students to help them to assess their own work. As a result, students are unsure about ways in which they can improve their work to achieve a higher grade.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

#### **Grade: 2**

The PRU provides a good curriculum that meets student' needs well. There is an appropriate focus on the core subjects of English, mathematics and science, supplemented by a good range of other courses and activities. Students make good progress with literacy and numeracy and

improving opportunities to use computers enable them to make satisfactory progress in information and communications technology. Students' willing participation in a wide range of physical, sporting and outdoor activities, such as canoeing and camping trips, means that they develop healthy lifestyles. Some also gain Duke of Edinburgh awards as a result. Students follow a course in preparation for working life. This links well with courses in personal, health and social education and opportunities for work experience. The PRU is developing links with local colleges and training providers, which offer alternative vocational opportunities for some students. However, these opportunities are too limited at present and are not accredited. They do not link directly with further education courses or employment opportunities. As a result, too few students moved directly to employment, education or training last year, when they left the PRU.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 3**

This aspect of the PRU's work is satisfactory. There are some strong features. Child protection procedures are thorough. Several students have severe needs, related to their social and emotional difficulties. Good links with a range of outside agencies, notably the Youth Offending Team, community police, social services and educational welfare services help the unit to meet these students' needs well. Parents and carers appreciate the effort that staff make to keep them informed of their child's progress. Support and guidance for students' future careers are good, but not always successful in ensuring that they move immediately to further education, employment or training when they leave the unit. Students respond well to a system of rewards for good behaviour and attendance. Their individual education plans also include targets for personal development. However, these are not precise enough. Staff do not refer to them regularly enough to ensure that they are effective. Similarly, students need more guidance to help them understand their academic targets.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher provides very good leadership and has established a clear vision for the role of the PRU, which is shared by all members of staff. During the last two years, two separate units have been successfully amalgamated. The move into new accommodation on the Bridgeway site has been managed efficiently and plans are now developing well for similar improvements at Badger's Hill. Common policies and practices have been introduced, resulting in the efficient deployment of staff; all staff work well together as a dedicated team. They place a strong emphasis on supporting students' personal development and well-being, which then enables students to achieve well. The headteacher and leading teachers on each site have begun to involve all staff in evaluating the success of the PRU's work. This has helped to identify appropriate priorities for further improvement. However, data about students' progress is not used systematically to set precise targets or identify clear criteria for success. A local authority advisory group currently oversees the work of the PRU. It provides satisfactory support, pending the formation of a properly constituted management committee following government guidance.

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## Annex A

## Inspection judgements

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

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	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	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	NA

### Achievement and standards

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	4
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	2

### Personal development and well-being

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	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	2
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	3

### The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?</b>	2
<b>How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?</b>	2
<b>How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?</b>	3

<sup>1</sup> 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.



## Annex A

**Leadership and management**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	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	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
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

4 September 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Alternative Curriculum 14-19,,RG14 7BT

I really enjoyed visiting your PRU and would like to thank you for your welcome and for being so friendly and helpful. I agree with you that the PRU is a good place to learn. You told me that you get on very well with the teachers and support staff and I could see that during lessons. This letter is to let you know what your PRU does well and how, with your help, it can be an even better place to learn. My main finding is that the school provides you with a good quality of education.

The best things about the PRU are that:

- those of you who are going through a difficult time in your life begin to overcome your difficulties because of the good support that you get from staff and support agencies
- the PRU provides a range of interesting courses that meet your needs well
- many of you improve your attendance and behaviour a lot and develop well, personally and socially
- you make good progress with your work and leave the PRU with better qualifications than you expected.

To make the PRU even better I have asked the staff to improve three main things:

- to set more precise targets for you to improve your work and personal development. You can ask staff to share these with you
- to collect and use information about your progress to evaluate the PRU's work more precisely
- to develop stronger links with local colleges, training providers and employers, so that more of you can get straight on to training courses when you leave the PRU.

Thank you again for your help. I hope you continue to work hard, do well and make the most of the good opportunities that the PRU provides for you.

Bill Robson

Lead Inspector