

Burton Learning Centre

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	134880
Local Authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	294200
Inspection date	13 March 2007
Reporting inspector	Terry Elston

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

Type of school	Pupil referral unit
School category	Pupil referral unit
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	79
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Headteacher	Simon Paley
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Berryhedge Lane Winshill Burton on Trent DE15 0DP
Telephone number	01283 239545
Fax number	01283 529784

Age group	11–16
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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) for pupils who have been excluded from school, refused to go to school or have medical conditions that prevent them attending their own school. Pupils' levels of attainment when they enter the unit are generally below average. The school occupies two sites at present, but is expected to move into larger buildings later this year. The unit will shortly amalgamate with the nearby Kettlebrook PRU. A few pupils split their time between the PRU and their own school.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a Notice to Improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to the curricular provision for pupils at one of the bases, the progress of full-time pupils, the assessment of pupils' progress and the governance of the PRU.

Inspector's judgements are consistent with the PRU's own view of the provision. Pupils' standards are below average and achievement is unsatisfactory because the 10 pupils who should be attending full-time, but have only 15 hours a week in the PRU, make inadequate progress. The teaching is satisfactory, and in the time pupils have at school, they learn at a satisfactory rate. However, they do not have sufficient opportunities to develop good writing skills, and this means that progress in this area is limited. Teachers know their pupils very well and are good at creating an atmosphere where they want to learn. As a result, pupils' personal development and well-being are good. They enjoy school, feel very safe and nearly all attend regularly. The leadership and management are satisfactory, but with significant strengths in the way leaders set the standards for behaviour and respect for others. This is why pupils behave so well and show such good respect for adults and other pupils. The leaders have high expectations of pupils, but they lack the information gained from assessment to show how well they are doing. At present, the school lacks a management committee to provide support, but that will be rectified when the two PRUs amalgamate. The curriculum provides an interesting range of activities that make pupils want to learn, but is inadequate because the full-time pupils have too little time in the PRU. If the PRU moves into the new buildings it plans to accommodate all pupils full-time. Parents value the school highly, particularly the good care, support and guidance it offers to their children. One parent's views were typical when writing, 'I am very grateful that there is such an establishment as this. My son really enjoys attending, and that reflects in the progress he has made in all his lessons'. The PRU is in a satisfactory position to improve, particularly as new assessment systems have just been introduced.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise achievement by ensuring that all pupils benefit from the amount of time in education to which they are entitled.
- Provide more opportunities for pupils to improve their writing skills.
- Put in place effective assessment systems that show how well pupils are achieving, and what they need to do to improve.
- Provide a management committee to challenge and support the staff.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Overall, standards are below average, and pupils make unsatisfactory progress because a significant group of them are provided with less than half the recommended number of hours. Consequently, they cover far less work than would normally be expected. Despite efforts by the staff to encourage these pupils to work on their own at home, they rarely do enough to compensate for the time lost. During their time at the PRU, they improve their basic reading and mathematical skills well and enjoy the opportunities to succeed, some for the first time.

Their writing, however, is often weak because they have too few opportunities to develop their skills or capacity to write long pieces of work. In information and communication technology (ICT), the pupils make good progress and benefit from good individual support to improve their skills and to research topics such as the rain forests and groups of animals. In science and design and technology, they make adequate progress, but the lack of specialist facilities limits their achievements. Older pupils do well in courses preparing them for the world of work. They particularly enjoy practical courses in car mechanics and firefighting, where they make good progress to gain the awards. The PRU has only recently been teaching Year 11 pupils and so none has yet taken GCSE examinations. However, those preparing for them next year are producing some good work. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities make satisfactory progress towards their targets and improve their reading well.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

A measure of success in pupils' personal development and well-being is the high proportion of excluded pupils who return successfully to their own school. While these pupils are able to attend for less time than they should, they show significant improvement in their attitudes to school and behaviour. Pupils enjoy lessons and work conscientiously to improve their skills. They are quick to say how much the small groups give them confidence that they sometimes lack at their own school. They speak highly of the very good relationships between the staff and themselves that make them want to come to school. 'It's good here,' said one pupil, 'because the teachers don't shout – they just explain things so you understand what to do'. They enjoy lessons and attendance rates for many pupils are significantly higher than at their own school. Pupils feel safe, and acts of bullying are rare. They have a sound understanding of the need to look after their bodies, but few are convinced about the value of healthy food. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. They develop strong friendships and have a clear sense of right and wrong. Few, however, think deeply about issues or write sensitively about the world around them. Pupils are adequately prepared for the future by their eager participation in work-experience activities and by working hard preparing for their examinations. For some, however, their weak writing skills are a barrier when it comes to applying for jobs. They make a good contribution to the community by enthusiastic involvement in projects such as gardening in the local area and holding Christmas fairs.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

A significant strength in the teaching is the way all teachers develop such strong relationships with pupils. They have such high expectations of pupils' behaviour, yet know when to show patience when one of them is feeling frustrated. This means that lessons are calm and nearly always free from interruptions. Teachers have good knowledge of subjects such as English, mathematics and design and technology, and this ensures that pupils learn many important skills well. In a design and technology lesson, for example, the skilled teacher worked very successfully with one pupil who found sawing a piece of wood difficult. By careful coaxing, expert demonstration and sharp focus on the skills necessary to saw the wood, the teacher was able to guide the pupil through the task. The pupil was delighted at completing the task and was justifiably proud of her achievements. Teaching assistants play an important role in supporting pupils, particularly those with learning and behavioural difficulties. This gives pupils

the confidence to tackle the work and ensures they make the same sort of progress as others. Assessment is inadequate, but starting to improve now that new systems are being put in place to measure pupils' progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 4

The PRU has done much in a short time to provide a varied and interesting curriculum that uses the staff's talents well. However, for those vulnerable pupils who have been excluded from their own school, the three hours a day allocated to them is inadequate and affects the progress they make. The curriculum has a sound focus on developing pupils' basic literacy and numeracy skills, but the over-reliance on worksheets in subjects such as science and geography gives pupils too few opportunities to write, and these skills are often their weakest. The accommodation is poor, and limits provision for practical subjects such as science and design and technology. The provision for personal, social and health education is good, and its impact is clear in the high quality of relationships and the responsible attitudes of pupils. Older pupils benefit from good opportunities to follow courses preparing them for work and college. They enjoy these and have gained valuable skills in gardening and engineering. The provision for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is satisfactory, and provides them with clear targets to improve their work.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pupils are well cared for by dedicated staff who have a good knowledge of their needs. Staff make pupils feel safe and valued, which is why their attendance is often so much better than at previous schools. All absences are followed up rigorously and pupils are given worthwhile incentives to come regularly. There are robust child protection and health and safety procedures and pupils' welfare is at the core of the PRU's thinking, whether in the buildings or out in the wider community. The PRU has very good relationships with a wide range of other professionals so that pupils benefit from high levels of expertise to meet their particular needs. The weakness in the tracking of pupils' progress is recognised by the PRU, but while comprehensive new systems have just been developed, they have yet to make an impact on pupils' achievements.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The leadership provides a community where pupils feel safe and valued. Expectations of the pupils are high, particularly in terms of their behaviour and attendance, and this is why the PRU is valued so highly by local schools. There are weaknesses in the curricular provision and assessment procedures, but the PRU is benefiting from good support from the other PRU with which it will amalgamate later this year. The decision to teach in groups those pupils with medical conditions (who were formally taught at home) was a good one. They gain much from working alongside others and there is evidence that their achievements have been enhanced as a result. The self-evaluation systems are currently inadequate but are showing improvement now that the PRU has the means to assess pupils' progress accurately. The PRU has no management committee at present to hold it to account and so governance is inadequate.

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Annex A

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?	4
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	4
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4
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	3
The behaviour of learners	2
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	3
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	4
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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
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	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	4
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?	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

14 March 2007

Dear Pupils,

Burton Learning Centre, Berryhedge Lane, Winshill, Burton-upon-Trent, Staffordshire, DE15 0DP

Thank you for contributing to the recent inspection. You were very helpful, and those who were kind enough to speak to me told me a lot about your school. I enjoyed watching you work hard in class and play basketball so well in the hall. There are many good things about your school, but it has been asked to improve even more.

What I found out about your school:

- You behave well and your teachers are justifiably proud of you.
- You attend regularly and clearly enjoy school.
- Most of you make the sort of progress expected, but some of you could do better if you were able to attend full-time.
- The teaching is satisfactory. Your teachers know you very well and work hard to help you succeed. You say how much you like the teachers and how they are patient with you. Your teachers do not always ask you to write enough.
- The school does not check on your progress well enough to show how well you are doing and what you could do even better.
- You are given an interesting range of activities and good opportunities to learn about the world of work.
- The leadership and management are satisfactory. The people who are in charge know how to improve things and work closely with the rest of the staff to make sure you are doing the right sort of work. However, they do not have the support of a management committee like other PRUs do to help them manage the school.
- You are well cared for and get good help when you are worried.

What I have asked the school to do now:

- Make sure that all pupils get the right amount of time in school.
- Improve your writing by giving you more practice in all subjects.
- Make better checks on your progress to see if you are doing well enough.
- Appoint a management committee to help run the school.

Yours sincerely, Terry Elston (Lead inspector)