

College Hall

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	131769
Local Authority	Bracknell Forest
Inspection number	315866
Inspection date	20 November 2008
Reporting inspector	William Geoffrey Robson

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 (total)	20
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Headteacher	Ms Marion Bent
Date of previous school inspection	20 June 2005
School address	West Road off Old Wokingham Road Wokingham RG40 3BT
Telephone number	01189 893378
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Age group	11–16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

College Hall is a pupil referral unit (PRU) that provides for students with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. Students have either been permanently excluded from mainstream schools, or are at risk of permanent exclusion. Most are in Years 10 and 11. Fewer students are in Years 7 to 9 than at the time of the previous inspection; the PRU's outreach service helps mainstream schools to support these younger students, to prevent further exclusions. The vast majority of students are of White British origin and about two thirds are boys. A few students have statements of special educational need.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

College Hall provides a satisfactory education for its students. This is due in large measure to the excellent leadership of the headteacher. She has provided stability and clear direction during a time of turbulence since the last inspection. For the last three years, the unit has been unable to recruit and retain a full complement of permanent teachers. Long-term illness and difficulties in recruiting a suitably qualified deputy headteacher have also hampered the management and development of the PRU. For example, some of the unit's work has been curtailed, notably its outreach support to mainstream schools. Despite many changes of staff, the headteacher has maintained a firm commitment to meeting students' needs. The current staff feel well supported and share the headteacher's dedication. In particular, they establish excellent relationships with students, who all say that they trust their teachers and get the help they need. One student said, 'They're more than teachers - more like friends and family.'

These positive relationships enable teachers to manage classes well, to help students to improve their behaviour and control their emotions. In this safe environment, students begin to enjoy their work and the attendance of the large majority improves significantly. Good links with a wide range of external support agencies ensure that students with more severe needs receive the extra help that they require. Teachers generally pitch work at the right level, so that students can succeed, with support from teaching assistants when necessary. However, teachers do not make the best use of assessment in order to help students improve their work further. They do not set individual targets for students, either for their academic work or for improving their behaviour. As a result, while students make satisfactory progress with their work and in their personal development they are unsure about how they can do even better. Overall, standards remain very low because of the difficulties that students have experienced prior to attending the unit. Given students' very low starting points, their achievement is satisfactory and some exceed the grades that their mainstream schools had predicted.

Students' behaviour and attitudes improve sufficiently for many to return to mainstream school, particularly in Years 7 to 10. Year 11 students rarely do so, but good support enables most to move into further education, employment or training when they leave the PRU. They develop satisfactory workplace skills in the unit but do not have enough opportunities to participate in work experience. Students enjoy good opportunities for physical education and outdoor activities and prepare healthy meals in food technology. Nevertheless, many eat unhealthy snacks and have difficulty giving up smoking. The PRU makes a satisfactory contribution to community cohesion. Students contribute to the local community by, for example, participating in fundraising events as part of their GCSE citizenship course. They also learn about human rights and improve their understanding of their own and other people's cultures. They say that teachers listen to them when they give their opinions, although there is no formal means of enabling this, such as a student council.

Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory, but clearly held back by staffing difficulties and the lack of a consistent senior management team. The local authority is providing much needed action to deal with these problems. An acting deputy headteacher has been appointed and an action plan has been produced to recruit more staff. Extra support for the monitoring of teaching and learning has been provided to reduce the headteacher's heavy workload. Given the PRU's success in enabling students to make satisfactory progress in recent years, it now has satisfactory capacity for further improvement. The headteacher's visible presence in the PRU, supporting staff and pupils on a day-to-day basis, means that she has a

clear understanding of the PRU's strengths and areas for improvement. However, more formal systems of evaluation are not yet established. For example, data about students' progress are not used to allow the PRU to evaluate effectiveness as rigorously as possible.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make every effort to recruit suitable staff to fill long-standing vacancies.
- Use assessment more effectively to set precise targets for individual students' personal development and academic achievement.
- Gather and analyse all available data to evaluate the PRU's effectiveness more rigorously.

A small proportion of schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Most students enter the centre with very low standards because of the difficulties they have experienced in mainstream schools. Many have missed a lot of their education through poor attendance and several fixed-term exclusions before attending the PRU. The large majority improve their attendance significantly. They therefore build on their learning week by week, as shown in their neatly presented files and exercise books. Students in Years 7 to 9, including those with literacy difficulties and statements of special educational needs, make satisfactory progress in English, mathematics and science. Each year, those Year 11 students who attend regularly gain at least one GCSE pass. A few achieve the higher A* to C grades. Nearly all gain entry-level qualifications in adult literacy and numeracy. Current students are on track to achieve similar results. In addition, they are making satisfactory progress on the vocational courses that the PRU has introduced this year. Their progress is particularly good in art and design because of the teacher's excellent subject knowledge. By comparison with national figures for all students, standards remain very low. Nevertheless, they represent satisfactory achievement for students who had little prospect of gaining qualifications before they entered the PRU.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Pupils' personal and social development is satisfactory, especially in view of the difficulties that they have experienced previously. They feel very secure in the unit as there is very little bullying. Staff quickly and efficiently deal with any incidents. Students trust their teachers and one girl rightly pointed out, 'They always listen to you and give you good advice.' These excellent relationships lead to improved attendance, behaviour and attitudes, as students begin to enjoy their education. The large majority of students attend much more regularly than they did in their mainstream schools, although overall attendance rates are reduced by a few persistent absentees. At times, some students still exhibit challenging behaviour. This is reflected in the need for the PRU to exclude some students for short periods, often for half a day, especially when they first attend. However, for the most part, the unit is a civilised environment, where students are considerate of each other and their teachers.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teachers quickly establish excellent relationships with students. Through careful initial assessments, they gain a clear understanding of students' strengths, needs and difficulties. As a result, they plan work that is sufficiently challenging but enables students to experience success. Students recognise this. As one student said, 'Teachers give you work at the right level and they are always there to help if it's difficult.' Teachers manage any challenging behaviour well, by insisting that students conform to classroom rules and, when appropriate, through the skilful avoidance of confrontation. Teachers share learning objectives with students at the beginning of lessons, so that students know what they are expected to achieve. However, teachers do not return to these to help students to evaluate how well they have done, or what they need to improve. As a result, students do not have sufficiently personalised targets, to help them focus on improving their own work or behaviour as much as they could. Teachers are aware of the need to develop their own skills in the use of interactive whiteboards and are receiving training to enable them to do so. They generally prepare other teaching resources well. However, in some lessons they do not plan enough variety of activities to maintain students' interest. This is sometimes because teachers have to teach subjects in which they are not specialists.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The PRU places an appropriate emphasis on the core subjects of English, mathematics and science, supplemented by a good range of other courses and activities in all years. Good facilities for information and communication technology (ICT), including the availability of laptop computers for all students, enable them to develop their ICT skills well. A well-organised course in personal, social, health and citizenship education helps students to achieve a better understanding of their emotions and feelings during a difficult time in their lives. It also broadens their understanding of human rights and other cultures and traditions. Music has recently been added to the curriculum and students enjoy the opportunity to use a well-equipped music studio.

Staff have responded well to students' requests for more options in Years 10 and 11. For the first time this year, the PRU has introduced six vocational courses accredited by the Business and Technology Enterprise Council (BTEC). Students can choose to study two of these courses. This has filled a recent shortfall in the availability of vocational courses offered by local colleges and alternative providers. However, students do not have enough opportunities to participate in work experience, to develop work-related learning skills in an authentic, practical environment.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Good links with a wide range of external support agencies enable the PRU to provide good support for students with more severe needs. The PRU has established an 'integrated care pathway', whereby regular meetings are held with these agencies to consider how individual students' needs can best be met. This also eases the assessment of students with statements of special educational needs and their transition to more specialist provision when this is more

appropriate. The PRU enabled three quarters of students in Years 7 to 10 to return to mainstream schools last year. Links with mainstream schools are therefore adequate, but are currently hampered by the lack of sufficient staff to support these students and schools through outreach work.

Students benefit from good advice and guidance for their future careers. As a result, most Year 11 students move on to further education, employment or training when they leave the PRU. However, they lack specific guidance about how to improve their work and behaviour during their time in the unit. Although teachers meet daily to discuss individual students' needs, they do not set students precise individual targets to further encourage progress. Students are therefore unsure about how well they are doing.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher provides excellent leadership. She has maintained an admirably clear vision for the further development of the unit, despite severe difficulties in the recruitment and retention of staff. For several lengthy periods since the last inspection, there has been no deputy headteacher, either because of illness or unsuccessful attempts to recruit a suitable replacement. There have been unfilled vacancies for three teachers for a considerable time. Despite this turbulence, the headteacher has maintained high morale among staff. Teachers work well as a team to support students.

The priority since the last inspection has therefore been to maintain at least satisfactory standards of achievement and personal development for students. This has been achieved. Innovative developments in the curriculum have been well managed and successfully introduced. However, the need for the headteacher and more experienced staff to cover absence and vacancies has understandably had a negative effect on the management of other planned developments. Some progress has been made in the gathering of data to record students' achievements. However, this is not yet used to evaluate precisely enough the success of the unit's work and set more challenging targets for further improvement.

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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?	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	3

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	3
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

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	3
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?	3

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

03 December 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of College Hall, Wokingham, RG40 3BT

I enjoyed visiting your PRU and would like to thank you for making me feel so welcome. Thank you also for telling me what you enjoy about the PRU and what you thought could be better. As you know, there are some very good things about it. The staff work hard to support and help you, especially when you are going through a difficult time in your lives. They are led by an excellent headteacher. Staff certainly help you to improve your behaviour and attendance. You also begin to make better progress with your work than you did previously. The PRU has good links with lots of support services to help them look after those of you who need extra help. My main finding is that the PRU provides you with a satisfactory quality of education.

To make the PRU even better, I have made the following suggestions for improvement.

- The PRU has several vacancies for staff that it has been unable to fill. It should make every effort to make sure that more staff are appointed.
- You need to have precise targets to aim for, so that you know exactly how you can improve your work and behaviour.
- The PRU needs to work out more precisely how well it is doing and what it needs to do to improve.

You can help your teachers by discussing and agreeing your targets with them, when they are ready to do this. You can also help to make the PRU even better by continuing to work hard and behaving as well as you can.

With best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

William Robson

Lead Inspector