

Stowe Teaching Unit

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	132131
Local Authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	315930
Inspection date	23 January 2008
Reporting inspector	Charles Hackett

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	13
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Headteacher	Kevan Paylor
Date of previous school inspection	12 January 2004
School address	Stowe Street Lichfield WS13 6AF
Telephone number	01543 510755
Fax number	01543 510755

Age group	11-16
Inspection date	23 January 2008
Inspection number	315930

© Crown copyright 2008

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Stowe Teaching Unit admits students who have been permanently excluded from mainstream schools. In addition, it offers short-term part-time placements for students on the roll of mainstream schools who are at risk of permanent exclusion.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Stowe Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) is a satisfactory unit. Without doubt, the PRU's strength lies in the work that it does with students on the roll of mainstream schools but at the risk of being permanently excluded. These students, who accept a short-term place, now represent the majority of the students in the unit and benefit from the PRU's very structured daily routines and the individual support provided. Because these students are receptive to the approach of the PRU, they make at least satisfactory and often good progress with their studies, and their personal development is good. The smaller number of students on roll who have been permanently excluded make satisfactory progress.

Standards are below average and students are typically reluctant learners on entry to the PRU. The good quality of teaching and learning is effective in quickly re-engaging them in learning so that their achievement is satisfactory. The individual tuition provided is particularly effective at supporting students to complete coursework set for them by their mainstream schools. Detailed planning ensures that students who have previously been reluctant to learn are now able to actively engage in learning. The curriculum is satisfactory but, for permanently excluded students in Years 10 and 11, it is restricted because, as at the last inspection, there are limited opportunities for vocational courses, life skills courses and for taking external examinations.

The quality of care, guidance and support is good because of the good individual support students receive. The clear daily routines ensure that students feel safe and enjoy being on site. Their behaviour and attendance improve, although there is no evidence collated to show if this is the situation when they return back to mainstream. Satisfactory links with other agencies provide students with some additional support when required.

Leadership and management have been effective in establishing a clear structure and consistent expectations for the daily life of the unit. A good team ethos has been created amongst the staff, who are very supportive of each other and positively encouraged by the management committee. Self-evaluation is satisfactory but the PRU does not routinely gather a wide enough range of evidence on how what it offers impacts on students' achievements. This in turn limits the ability of the unit, including its management committee, to know precisely how effective it is and to sustain a sharp enough focus on areas for improvement.

Although the quality of the PRU's work onsite is often good, a selective admission process limits the PRU's intake of students permanently excluded from the local secondary schools. Only students who show a willingness to meet stringent behaviour expectations at an interview are admitted and students who have previously attended are not readmitted if problems occur back in mainstream. The PRU and the local authority acknowledge the need to revise admission procedures to widen opportunities for admission to the unit.

What the school should do to improve further

- Provide a wider range of curriculum opportunities for permanently excluded students in Years 10 and 11 and increase their opportunities to pass external examinations.
- Gather more information on students' achievements to enable the PRU to better understand the impact of its work.
- Extend the range of its work to enable it to meet the needs of more students who have been permanently excluded from secondary schools.

A small proportion of the 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

Understandably, all students admitted have often missed a great deal of school and as a result, their standards are below the national average. Achievement is satisfactory because the strong focus on meeting students' individual needs effectively re-engages them in learning. Those on short-term placements are very receptive to this individual support and the great majority return to their mainstream schools to successfully complete their courses. Test results and work in students' books suggests that those students who have been previously permanently excluded from a mainstream school make at least satisfactory progress, notably in English and mathematics. These students are a minority of the total on roll and most of these improve their reading and become far more confident in mathematics. However, the breadth of their achievements is restricted by the limited curriculum in Years 10 and 11 and too few opportunities to pass external examinations.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Overall students' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is good. The unit has very clear expectations of students' behaviour, and observation of students suggest that they behave in a far more appropriate way within the unit than they have done previously in mainstream education. Their attendance improves, with particularly impressive records of attendance for those students on short-term placements. Students are happy to make positive contributions to the school community, such as clearing away, and washing and drying up dishes after their lunch. Students readily adopt healthy lifestyles, as shown by their active participation in break-time games and weekly swimming, and by their consumption of fruit, which is made easily available. Students are also able to make a positive contribution to the local community by carrying out errands for senior citizens. The detailed assessments of their ability in English and mathematics means that gaps in their skills are identified and this therefore helps to prepare them well for their future economic well-being, although this is only satisfactory overall because of the limited emphasis on vocational studies.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The strength in the teaching is the quality of individual support to students provided by teachers and teaching assistants. As a result, students with previous negative attitudes to learning whose achievement had been inadequate in their mainstream setting now make satisfactory progress. Much of this support is centred on work that has been passed on from the local mainstream schools, but this is enhanced by well-chosen resources, particularly for English and mathematics. Information and communication technology (ICT) is used well to support learning and again, individual support here addresses weaknesses students have in using particular software programs. Teachers encourage students to evaluate the quality of their work and set appropriate targets for improvement. The quality of their marking is good, with good helpful comments.

The small amount of group teaching does mean that students' experiences of working and learning together are limited.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum has a strong focus on English and mathematics. Much of each morning is spent on these subjects, with the emphasis being on assessing students' skills and knowledge and offering support to fill the gaps. Some improvements have been made to the curriculum since the previous inspection. For example, there are increased opportunities for design and technology, and resources for teaching ICT have increased. For the majority of students on short-term placements, the curriculum is sufficiently wide because of good links with mainstream schools. This ensures that such students follow their mainstream curriculum during their placement. However, the curriculum for the minority of permanently excluded students is limited, especially because there are not enough opportunities to follow vocational courses.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

There is a very positive atmosphere in the unit. There are secure arrangements in place for safeguarding students. There are very clear expectations for students' behaviour and each day is highly structured to avoid disruption to learning. Organised games during break and lunchtimes ensure that students learn to play together. Playing chess at the start of each day also encourages them to behave appropriately while engaging in an activity with another student. All of this benefits students' personal development although there are not enough opportunities on the curriculum to enhance their life skills.

Academic guidance is especially effective for all students in English and mathematics. Those students on short-term placements also benefit from the good links with mainstream schools and from the flexible approach staff adopt in planning their work. This means they successfully complete the work that their peers are doing in their normal mainstream schools.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The leadership and management of the PRU have been effective in ensuring that there is strong individual support provided for all students within the unit. This has led to all students showing improved behaviour and making at least satisfactory progress. Provision for students on short-term placements has been successfully developed through good links with mainstream schools and good planning, enabling the great majority of these students to return to their mainstream schools and complete their courses. Leadership and management have been less successful at extending what the PRU can offer to ensure that it can effectively support the different needs of permanently excluded students in Years 10 and 11. The management committee has now strengthened monitoring procedures and the unit now has a satisfactory understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. Staff view these improvements positively. However, the unit needs to routinely gather more information on students' achievements to sharpen its own understanding of precisely how effective it is and to know where improvements are needed.

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.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
---	----------------

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	No
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 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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	2
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?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
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 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 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

Thank you for being so pleasant when I visited your unit recently. I very much enjoyed meeting you and finding out about the work of the unit.

I consider the unit to be satisfactory. Its strengths include the individual support it is able to give you so that your personal development is good and you make satisfactory progress in your work. The staff work together well and the clear routines of each day ensure you feel safe and know what is expected of you. The teaching is good and this allows many of you to go back to your mainstream schools, confident you have not missed the work others in your class have been doing. For those of you who come to the PRU having been excluded from a mainstream school, your behaviour improves and you are able to concentrate more on your studies.

The PRU provides you with a satisfactory curriculum and is satisfactorily managed. It does, though, have some aspects of its work that are in need of improvement. It should:

- offer a wider range of subjects for those of you in Years 10 and 11 who may not be going back to mainstream, including more opportunities to pass external examinations
- improve how it records what you achieve to help it know how well it is helping you
- look at what it can do to help more students who have been permanently excluded from school.

As the unit begins to look at these areas, you can help too, by always trying your best. Please accept my best wishes for your educational and vocational futures.



25 January 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Stowe Teaching Unit, Lichfield, WS13 6AF

Thank you for being so pleasant when I visited your unit recently. I very much enjoyed meeting you and finding out about the work of the unit.

I consider the unit to be satisfactory. Its strengths include the individual support it is able to give you so that your personal development is good and you make satisfactory progress in your work. The staff work together well and the clear routines of each day ensure you feel safe and know what is expected of you. The teaching is good and this allows many of you to go back to your mainstream schools, confident you have not missed the work others in your class have been doing. For those of you who come to the PRU having been excluded from a mainstream school, your behaviour improves and you are able to concentrate more on your studies.

The PRU provides you with a satisfactory curriculum and is satisfactorily managed. It does, though, have some aspects of its work that are in need of improvement. It should:

- offer a wider range of subjects for those of you in Years 10 and 11 who may not be going back to mainstream, including more opportunities to pass external examinations
- improve how it records what you achieve to help it know how well it is helping you
- look at what it can do to help more students who have been permanently excluded from school.

As the unit begins to look at these areas, you can help too, by always trying your best. Please accept my best wishes for your educational and vocational futures.

Charles Hackett
Lead inspector