

Burton Learning Centre

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	134880
Local Authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	319588
Inspection dates	10–11 June 2008
Reporting inspector	Andrew Cook HMI

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	7–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	79
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Headteacher	Roger Barker
Date of previous school inspection	13 March 2007
School address	Berryhedge Lane Winshill Burton on Trent DE15 0DP
Telephone number	01283 239545
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors.

Description of the school

Burton Learning Centre is a pupil referral unit (PRU) for pupils who have been excluded from school, are at risk of permanent exclusion, refused to go to school, or have medical conditions that prevent them attending their own school. The school has three sites, Berry Hedge Lane, Waterloo Street, and Uttoxeter PRU. A small number of pupils receive home tuition and an educational provider teaches a further small group at another site. The ratio of boys to girls is almost 4 to 1. Most pupils are White British with around 40% from minority ethnic groups. Approximately 15% of pupils have a statement of special educational needs.

In March 2007, Burton Learning Centre was inspected and given a Notice to Improve. It was monitored by an inspector in November 2007 and judged to be making inadequate progress. In May 2007, it was federated with another PRU in Tamworth and a joint management committee was formed. The headteacher of these federated PRUs has had absences due to ill health, hence the running of Burton Learning Centre was delegated to an acting headteacher in late November 2007, whose substantive role is at the PRU in Tamworth. The acting headteacher took on the responsibility of leadership and management of the Burton Learning Centre whilst also maintaining links with the PRU in Tamworth.

Following a meeting with the local authority (LA) and a group of headteachers from East Staffordshire, a recommendation was made to the joint management committee that a single management committee should be formed.

The PRU was expecting to move to new buildings in October 2007. There remain delays in the building project, which are frustrating pupils and staff. A new headteacher and deputy headteacher have been appointed for September 2008.

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, HMCI is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its students an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement.

Pupils' self confidence and self esteem improve when pupils attend the PRU because staff are very committed to providing a high level of care and they strive to do the best for all pupils, especially at the Waterloo site. These positive features of the PRU are unmistakable but are undermined by inadequate strategic leadership. Despite huge efforts from the acting headteacher and staff, there is no rigour or robustness in dealing with the weaknesses in provision and support and challenge from the local authority have been, and remain, inadequate. This demonstrates that the PRU does not have the capacity to improve.

The progress pupils make, including those with a statement of special educational needs, is inadequate. When they attend lessons, they often make at least satisfactory progress. However, many of the pupils' achievement overall is seriously hampered by their non attendance. Because pupils do not turn up to lessons they keep falling behind further in the standards they attain. At the Berry Hedge site effective improvements in raising achievement and standards have taken place, and both pupils and staff are rightly proud of the qualifications that the pupils are beginning to achieve.

The teaching pupils receive when they do attend is at least satisfactory. Teachers use a range of skills to engage pupils in learning and praise them when they have achieved well. Teaching assistants are valued members of the teaching team and often effectively support and teach groups of pupils. Where teaching is less effective, it does not use assessment data to help pitch the level of difficulty of the work that is given to pupils. Too often teachers rely on textbooks to do this for them.

The curriculum is inadequate, especially for those pupils who have a statement of special educational needs because their specific individual needs are not met. Not all pupils have access to enough teaching time. Personal, social, citizenship and health education, an important part of the curriculum, is not taught effectively. There have been some improvements in the curriculum offered to pupils at the Berry Hedge site, which are benefiting them.

Pupils speak positively about the PRU and a small number of parents who wrote to inspectors praised what the PRU is doing to help their children. However, poor attendance, a lack of opportunities in personal, social, citizenship and health education, and low skill levels in English and mathematics all contribute to pupils' inadequate personal development.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the achievement of all pupils especially those with a statement of special educational needs.
- Improve pupils' attendance.
- Ensure that the curriculum meets the needs of all groups, especially pupils with a statement of special educational needs, and that all pupils receive their full entitlement to personal, social, citizenship and health education.

- Put in a place a management committee that can provide effective strategic planning, and which rigorously monitors and evaluates the effectiveness of the senior leadership team and quality of the PRU's provision.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

The amount of progress that pupils make is inadequate. This is in part due to the low levels of attendance creating huge gaps in the opportunities pupils have to learn. Although pupils' achievement is tracked in some subjects at the Berry Hedge site, the PRU is not effectively evaluating how well all pupils do, and little is known about the progress they are making. The progress of pupils with statements of special educational needs is inadequate because the provision they receive is not thought through effectively. Standards are often exceptionally low and pupils achieve satisfactorily in only a very limited number of subject areas. There have been some moves in the right direction with pupils achieving GCSE grades in science and art and some accredited results in geography and information and communication technology (ICT). However, all of this is hampered by poor attendance and poor accommodation, which does not enable the essentials of some subjects to be taught in full.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 4

In terms of promoting pupils' self confidence and self esteem, the PRU is very effective. Parents and carers of pupils at Waterloo Street feel that the staff are doing a 'wonderful job'. One stated that 'my child has never been happier'. Those who attend each of the other sites enjoy their experience and are highly motivated to learn. However, despite action taken to promote attendance, attendance levels remain inadequate. Pupils generally behave well in lessons and at break times, encouraged by the reward system and by the ethos of positive praise. They relate well both to each other and to staff. Pupils evaluate their behaviour in half termly reviews and contribute to the setting of targets for improvement. They say they feel safe, and that they have someone to talk to if they have any concerns. Pupils show a reasonable understanding of how to be healthy.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is inadequate. The current lack of provision for teaching personal, social, citizenship and health education for all pupils has a severely limiting effect on pupils' personal development. In addition, although there are good opportunities for pupils to develop team building skills and to work together, they have insufficient opportunity to contribute to the wider community. Moreover, despite good opportunities for taking part in work experience, poor attendance and low standards in basic skills mean that too few pupils have the skills required to equip them effectively for the future.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching is satisfactory overall with a number of good features. Relationships between pupils and adults are positive. Skilful questioning builds pupils' confidence and extends their learning. Teachers have clear, high expectations of both behaviour and learning, but maintain a relaxed atmosphere, with goodwill and humour evident. Although teaching is clearly focused on the

expected learning, teachers show flexibility in order to meet pupils' needs. Teachers have good subject knowledge, which enables them to identify gaps in pupils' understanding. At its best, teaching uses every moment of the lesson effectively, for example by skilfully weaving together scientific theory and its application to real life in order to extend pupils' understanding.

The development of literacy skills is limited by the fact that pupils are too often using worksheets to record their learning. In addition, although pupils receive ongoing verbal feedback, and some marking gives clear guidance to pupils as to how to improve their work, written feedback does not always give pupils sufficient guidance about how to improve. Although new systems have been put in place, there is insufficient rigour in teachers' use of assessment.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 4

The curriculum does not adequately meet all learners' needs. A significant number of pupils do not have access to enough lessons in the week where they are taught. The curriculum for pupils who have statements of special educational needs is inadequate. For these students the PRU is unclear as to how to ensure that provision, as outlined in their statement, is met and therefore the local authority is not fulfilling statutory requirements.

There have been some improvements to the curriculum, for example the introduction of GCSE courses in science and art along with accredited courses in ICT and geography. A small number of students have taken on a music technology course called 'Project Wired', which has successfully engaged them in learning. More pupils are benefiting from work experience, although there is no accredited course that is linked to these activities to give clear paths for achievement. Although the curriculum has benefited from these improvements, they do not reflect a long term strategic plan for the curriculum across the PRU. Issues concerning personal, social, and citizenship and health education have a negative impact on provision, as does the poor state of buildings. Furthermore, weaknesses in tracking achievement also lead to a curriculum that does not enable pupils to build on what they have already learnt. Although the local authority still intends to move the PRU into a new purpose built building at some point, plans to extend and develop the curriculum are not fully in place.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 4

Staff are highly committed to improving outcomes for pupils. They know pupils very well and provide a good level of care. There are strong links with a range of settings and professionals, all of whom make a good contribution to supporting pupils to engage with learning. The PRU ensures that the required checks are carried out regarding the suitability of staff, and child protection procedures are in place, but due to inconsistencies there is a need to update staff knowledge. During the inspection, an issue regarding the health and safety of pupils was drawn to the attention of the local authority. Pupils are generally well supported in lessons by dedicated teachers and teaching assistants. However, too little attention is paid to supporting those pupils with statements of special educational needs and provision is inadequate. Furthermore, for many pupils the academic guidance given to them is not helping them to understand how well they are doing or what they need to do to improve. Although there is evidence at the Berry Hedge site that academic targets are beginning to be used to motivate pupils this is not the case for most others where achievement is not always a priority. Data are not being used effectively to track pupils' progress, inform planning and set next step targets for pupils.

Leadership and management

Grade: 4

Since the previous inspection, there has been a significant lack of strategic leadership, which has led to inadequate improvements in the quality of education provided. The acting headteacher has worked tirelessly amidst the uncertainty of decisions about management committees, buildings and staffing and has brought a sense of stability. In many ways, his professionalism has been unquestionable. However, his commitments with his substantive post at the Tamworth PRU, and the magnitude of the task at Burton Learning Centre, have meant he has not been able to ensure that various aspects of the PRU have improved enough.

Teachers who have taken on the responsibility for subjects in the Berry Hedge site have begun to track the progress that pupils make. This work is at very early stages of development. In science, tracking has led to identifying what extra work pupils require and so has informed teaching. However, although this work has taken place, it is isolated and other areas of the provision do not have the same effectiveness nor are there plans to make improvements.

The joint management committee has not ensured that the Burton Learning Centre has received the much needed extensive support and challenge necessary for a school given a Notice to Improve. The local authority(LA) decision to change direction to Burton Learning Centre having its own management committee has yet to be clearly thought through despite this committee having to take control in the very near future. Additionally, the LA plans in place to manage the handover of leadership and management to the new headteacher and deputy headteacher are inadequate. To exacerbate the situation further, the LA has been unable to manage the new building for it to open, as planned, for October 2007. Local authority support has failed to evaluate rigorously the effectiveness of the PRU and has therefore left important work undone and allowed inadequate provision to continue.

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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
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	4

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
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	4

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	4
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	4
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
How well learners enjoy their education	3
The attendance of learners	4
The behaviour of learners	3
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	4
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	4

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?	4

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?	4
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	4
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	4
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	4
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	4
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?	Yes
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

12 June 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Burton Learning Centre, Burton on Trent DE15 0DP

I am writing to let you know about the findings from the recent inspection. First, I would like to thank you all for the time you spent talking with us and the way you were so polite and helpful. I particularly enjoyed playing pool on the second day at Berry Hedge, although I was a little embarrassed by the number of shots I missed. Although I only visited the Berry Hedge site, Heather (the other inspector) also visited Waterloo Road and the site in Uttoxeter. Some of the things that impressed us most were the way staff are helping you to become more confident and feel good about yourselves and what you can achieve. We also thought that some of the courses on offer, including 'Project Wired', are helping you to learn successfully.

Having talked with yourselves and staff and seen what is happening, we have made the decision that the PRU is not doing as much as it should to help you learn. One of the big problems staff have to deal with is the number of times when you do not turn up for school. This is something you need to get sorted with the help of your teachers. When you improve your attendance, it will help you to achieve more in lessons, which is something we have asked the PRU to work on. More needs to be done to make sure the subjects you are taught are the most suitable for you and any of you that need special help receive it. We have also asked staff to make sure you receive personal, social, citizenship and health education lessons, which will help you prepare for life after you leave the PRU. Finally, we have asked the local authority and the staff to think more carefully about how to keep checking that the PRU improves. Because of our concerns, we have placed your PRU in special measures. This means that inspectors will visit regularly to check that progress is being made.

You may be attending the PRU for a short period or it might be best for you to be there for longer. Those of you who will be there in September I wish you all the best in your new building and with your new headteacher and deputy headteacher.

Best wishes

Andrew Cook Her Majesty's Inspector

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Best wishes



Andrew Cook
Her Majesty's Inspector