

Merit Medical PRU

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	134159
Local Authority	Stoke-On-Trent
Inspection number	319929
Inspection dates	18–19 March 2008
Reporting inspector	David Simpson HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools the authority to cause any school to be inspected. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Pupil referral unit
School category	Pupil referral unit
Age range of pupils	4–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	33
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Headteacher	Julia McBride
Date of previous school inspection	14 March 2006
School address	Penkhull Education Centre Princes Road Stoke-on-Trent ST4 7JS
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

This is a pupil referral unit (PRU) which admits pupils who have medical needs that prevent them from attending school. The vast majority of pupils have emotional or psychological difficulties. The PRU is now based in one centre together with provision for a class in the local hospital. Seven pupils are taught at home for five hours a week. The youngest pupil currently on roll is in Year 1 and with the exception of two all pupils are of secondary education age. Almost all pupils are from White British backgrounds. One member of staff is currently unwell and has been absent from the centre for some time. When the PRU was last inspected it was judged to require special measures.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

Merit Medical PRU provides a satisfactory and rapidly improving quality of education. Its ethos respects, values and rewards the individualism of its students. Consequently, the students gain the self confidence, personal skills and academic preparation which enables them to return to education in schools or colleges. Their behaviour is outstanding. Distinctively, there is a very high quality of relationships which is reinforced by the pastoral teams. These teams ensure the consistent involvement of adults in the social life of the unit and serve to promote healthy competition and collaborative work amongst the students.

The care, guidance and support the students receive are a strength of the unit. The highly individualised help students receive helps them to feel safe and re-engage with education. The care given to their personal and interpersonal skills is very effective, although academic guidance, whilst sound, does not always challenge students enough. Students benefit from a wide and varied curriculum all securely based on attaining appropriate accreditation, such as attaining a qualification in customer services or participating in a visit to see 'Romeo and Juliet'. This serves to increase their appetite for more opportunities to receive a full week's taught time of education as their confidence grows. However, the curriculum does not yet offer a full week of lessons to meet fully the needs of students who are ready for this.

The students who attend the unit enjoy their education and participate well in the school community, including leading assemblies. Given the challenging circumstances of some of the students, attendance is satisfactory overall. However, attendance is low for some students, and improving attendance is a priority for the unit. The unit is sensitive to the needs of students who receive home tuition or are hospitalised, and their taught programmes clearly relate to their mainstream education.

Pupils generally make satisfactory, and sometimes better, academic progress during their time at Merit. Their progress with regard to personal development and well-being is good. Teaching is increasingly effective in reinforcing the unit's belief in the interrelationship between the two. A growing proportion of lessons expects students to take responsibility for their learning, work with one another constructively, and respond to questions where they have to justify their opinions. Recently, students have made accelerated progress in English as a result of effective, challenging teaching which is beginning to address previous underachievement. As a result of the attainment of students in the basic skills of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT), they are adequately prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.

The leadership and management of the unit is good. The Teacher-in-Charge (TiC) has managed the unit through turbulent times and shown great sensitivity whilst rigorously implementing change. She has usefully exploited the advice from local and national expertise to improve the quality of education. As a result of the increased capacity arising out of the appointment of a deputy TiC, the unit has been able to establish and maintain very thorough and effective monitoring procedures and considerably accelerated the rate of improvement. Alongside this, the unit has maintained a strong cohesion between staff and students which celebrates success, responds positively to professional development, and puts into practice the unit's priorities for improvement. The governing body has been reconstituted and has a very useful range of

expertise. It is beginning to ask challenging questions, although its committee structure is embryonic and members have not yet made many visits to see the unit in operation. Merit has established strong links with a range of partners, including child and adolescent mental health services, local schools and PRUs across the country, and these have considerably improved its effectiveness in meeting the needs of young people and promoting their engagement in education. The unit has a proven track record of improvement. The considerable extension of the unit's curriculum to offer qualifications which better meet students' abilities, the improved quality of teaching, the higher standard of facilities and, most importantly, the high aspirational culture which now pervades Merit demonstrate that its capacity for improvement is good.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 0

At the time of the inspection, no children were taught as part of the Foundation Stage.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve attendance.
- Further extend opportunities for students to experience a full time taught curriculum.
- Sustain the recent improved progress of students in English.

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

The PRU works with pupils who have had disrupted educational experiences and face significant challenges as a result of physical or emotional illness. During their time at the unit, they make at least satisfactory progress and benefit from a suitably challenging range of accredited courses. In English, students have recently received stimulating teaching which is helping to overcome a legacy of underachievement. In 2007 National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 9, the majority of students attained the nationally expected levels in English and science. Whilst standards were lower in mathematics, all pupils in mathematics made at least satisfactory progress over three years. All who completed their compulsory education attained at least one GCSE qualification and the majority attained a C grade in mathematics.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students grow at Merit. They arrive with serious difficulties and leave with a belief in themselves. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Students have many opportunities to consider other cultures and faiths and play an active part in weekly assemblies based around a thought for the week which promotes reflection and sharing. During the inspection, an outstanding assembly was observed which enabled students to pay tribute to one another, appreciate different talents, and lead a prayer. Students who attend the unit develop a good awareness of healthy living. They make progress both physically and emotionally. For example, students considered the appropriate ingredients for a smoothie and in customer services they were assured in deciding a balanced menu. Links with a local football club are strengthening their opportunities for physical recreation. Emotional well-being is consistently

evident in the care the young people take of one another and respect for the adults who look after them. Students speak positively of how safe they feel at the unit and their growing self belief enables them to face the challenge of either returning to a mainstream school or on towards further education. For example, during the inspection one student attended an interview at a local college and began to appreciate that she could aspire to applying for a university place. The unit is ambitious to attain attendance targets equivalent to mainstream schools. It actively promotes good attendance and rewards improvements. However, it is inevitable, given its cohort of students, that improving standards of attendance will remain a central challenge. Those who do attend – many of whom have had a long history of absence from education – enjoy their education and speak positively of the relationships they have with the adults at the unit. There is strong evidence of students being encouraged to contribute to the improvement of the unit. For example, they impressively worked alongside students from a mainstream school to design a wall mural for the unit and presented the outcomes to Merit's governing body. Students are being provided with increasing opportunities for work experience and work related learning experience which have a beneficial effect on their readiness for later life.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Merit provides a stimulating learning environment. Lesson planning has a focus upon encouraging pupils to actively engage in their learning and teachers are increasingly skilled at using questions which encourage the pupils to reflect and find answers for themselves. However, although these plans have improved, they do not consistently pay attention to the needs of individual students. The teachers' subject knowledge is secure and informs assured teaching. Teachers are actively promoting literacy across the curriculum and, in particular, impressively promote the students' use of technical vocabulary. Marking is supportive and often related to how students can improve their work, but this lacks consistency of challenge.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum provides opportunities for students to develop essential skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT and also to experience a range of subjects which will equip them for the next stage of their education. These are appropriately accredited to support the progression of students. Strengths include the breadth of vocational qualifications which enable students to demonstrate responsibility and make decisions about their future. However, whilst the unit has been successful in significantly increasing the amount of taught time students receive, this still does not match a full week as experienced in a mainstream school, and students would like to have that opportunity. Effective plans are in place to address this through the high quality relationships Merit enjoys with local schools and through the development of diploma qualifications from next September across the city. Extra-curricular activities are based around developing students' confidence and have included taking part in celebratory events for local schools and investigating local history.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The care and support for students at Merit is a strength. The staff have a common ambition to make sure that students feel valued and make a successful reintegration into education. The monitoring of attendance is thorough and is complemented by rewards systems which encourage students to help one another attend more regularly. Teaching assistants play a significantly beneficial role in helping students to reintegrate into school or move on to college. This helps the teaching assistants to increase their awareness of the expectations of students in mainstream education, but is significantly stretching their ability to play a full part in supporting students whilst they are placed at the unit. The development of team groups that mix students of varying ages has had a positive effect on their attitudes, in particular their sense of responsibility for one another. Tutors know their students well and the care they receive is strongly appreciated by students. However, the academic monitoring of students is not consistently secure to ensure that all students make the progress they could.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The TiC and deputy TiC are a formidable team who have considerably accelerated the progress the unit is making. They have detailed analysis of data and records of lesson observations, line management meetings and reintegration programmes, and can demonstrate the impact of their work. Merit knows itself well. There are clear priorities for improvement that are carried forward in the delivery of lessons and the pastoral care of students. Professional development for staff is increasingly well tailored to their needs and is having a demonstrable impact on expectations in the classroom. The governing body incorporates a valuable range of local partners and this is beginning to have an impact in supporting the work of the unit. There are appropriate plans for governors to visit the unit after suitable training has been undertaken, to develop further governors' awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of provision.

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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?	2
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	IE ²
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
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	3
The behaviour of learners	1
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?	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?	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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
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

20 March 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Merit Medical PRU, Stoke-on-Trent ST4 7JS

Thank you for being so warm and welcoming on the five visits I have made to Merit. During that time your education has been transformed and you're now receiving the challenge and stimulation which will help you to either go into mainstream education or college.

Merit is a special place. It helps you to acquire the skills and self confidence to make the next steps in your education. The relationships you establish with the adults at the unit are very strong, based on mutual respect and care. The celebration assembly I saw during my last visit was exemplary. It showed how you valued one another and respected your different talents. Those of you who do not attend as regularly as you should do not appreciate what you are missing. On two visits you have treated me with the delicious food and excellent customer care, and I hope you are rewarded with the customer service accreditation you deserve.

- Mrs McBride would not expect me to leave without suggesting a few things for the unit to do to improve and these are:
 - improve attendance
 - increase the time you are formally taught either at Merit or local schools or colleges
 - maintain improvements in your progress in English.

You can help by making sure you attend regularly and continuing to work with effort and enthusiasm.

Thank you again for being so helpful.

Yours sincerely

David Simpson HMI

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