

# Ashford and Shepway Alternative Curriculum PRU

Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	135462
<b>Local Authority</b>	Kent
<b>Inspection number</b>	329096
<b>Inspection dates</b>	9–10 June 2009
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Sarah Mascal

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Pupil referral unit
<b>School category</b>	Pupil referral unit
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	14–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School (total)	103
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The local authority
<b>Headteacher</b>	Deborah Birks
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>School address</b>	Kroner House Eurogate Business Park Ashford TN24 8XU
<b>Telephone number</b>	01233 868581
<b>Fax number</b>	01233 898701

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

The Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) opened on 1 January 2008 following reorganisation by the local authority of its services for those students who are at risk of, or have been, permanently excluded from their schools, and those dual rolled with schools who need access to a different curriculum for Years 10 and 11. The PRU is known to students, staff and parents as the Birchwood Alternative Curriculum PRU and is referred to in the report as Birchwood.

Birchwood caters for students in Years 10 and 11 who have been permanently excluded from their mainstream or special school settings. Students attend one of five full-time education provisions in Ashford and Folkestone which are commissioned by Birchwood under contractual service level agreements and are run by four providers. The centres are:

- South Kent College, Ashford, with 25 places
- South Kent College, Folkestone, with 35 places
- ARC 25, C/o Route 25, Folkestone, with 12 places
- Three men in a Boat is an on demand peripatetic service with at present 4 students
- Alternative Curriculum Youth Project (ACYP), Folkestone, with 20 places
- Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) Ten/11 Centre, Ashford, with 15 places.

The administrative centre for the PRU is based in Ashford.

The majority of staff have a professional qualification or are working towards one. There are two qualified teachers. All staff have experience in working with vulnerable young people. The large majority of students are of White British heritage. Of these, 6% of students have statements of special educational needs and 8% are looked after. Many students have additional special needs including dyslexia, attention deficit hyperactive disorder and challenging behaviours.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 3

Birchwood provides a satisfactory education for its students. It is improving at a good rate because of strong leadership from its manager. She has ensured that there are clear and effective systems and procedures in place and these are enabling the different centres to develop and improve. While it is recognised that there are still some inconsistencies to be ironed out, the centres have a clear focus on ensuring students make progress and, as a result, students' achievements are satisfactory. Many students gain accreditation through entry level and level 1 and 2 courses and make improvements in their literacy and numeracy skills. A positive aspect of provision is the number of students who gain places on college courses and move on to training or further education when they leave. However, there are a small number of poor attenders at each setting and, consequently, attendance levels are too low overall. Birchwood is working hard to improve this and attendance levels overall have improved well over the past year.

On the whole, students are generally positive about their experiences in the centres and their enjoyment is satisfactory. All said they felt safe and that staff are supportive. Many make improvements in their behaviour and comment on the fact that they feel they are behaving a lot better than in their previous settings. They generally settle well to tasks and follow instructions in lessons. Teaching is satisfactory overall. Staff, across all centres, manage students' behaviour well and there are generally good relations with the students. However, not all staff consistently use information from assessments of students' progress to set challenging targets for their learning and make sure that the work is matched to each individual. This is reflected in students' comments that the work is sometimes too easy. The curriculum is satisfactory overall because most centres have established an appropriate range of activities that focus on students' academic progress and on supporting students' personal development. However, some students attending the college settings feel that courses sometimes lack challenge. Attendance rates are lower at the colleges than in the other settings. Birchwood acknowledges that there are weaknesses in the provision at the colleges and is already taking action to address this. Accommodation for two centres, ARC 25 and ACYP, is inadequate both in terms of space and the facilities available.

The care and welfare of students is good and is well supported through strong links with multi agencies. This ensures that students make satisfactory and, for some, good progress in their personal development. Systems, though, for ensuring students know what they need to do to improve academically are less secure. Although there are examples of students being set good targets that are helping them to learn, this is not consistent across the centres and in some cases targets have not been updated for some time. Not all students are aware that they have targets and what they have to do to improve. The marking of work does not consistently provide students with an understanding of how they can improve their work.

The managers of the centres are adapting well to the high expectations of the Birchwood manager. They are developing their skills in managing and monitoring their centres and in some cases are having a good impact on improving provision. This is particularly the case at the YMCA centre where staff, parents and students comment positively about the recent changes that have been made there. The Birchwood manager is clear about the strengths and weaknesses of the centres but this is not always reflected in the development planning for Birchwood as a whole. There are good expectations that centre managers will contribute to this development planning through formally assessing the strengths and weaknesses of their own centres but

this process is at an early stage. The management committee, although fairly new, is starting to challenge Birchwood. It is well led and there are appropriate initiatives to develop closer links with staff. The commitment of staff and determination of Birchwood's manager ensures that it has capacity to improve further.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Improve attendance rates of students overall, but particularly at the colleges, and ensure that the curriculum is well planned, challenging and stimulating in all settings.
- Ensure staff make effective use of assessment information to set targets for learning so that they can better match work to each individual and students know what they have to do to improve.
- Improve the role of centre managers in formally assessing the strengths and weakness of their centres in order to contribute more effectively to whole PRU improvement planning.
- Improve the quality of accommodation for ARC 25 and ACYP to ensure that staff and students have good quality space and facilities.

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**

Standards are well below average due to the disruption in students' education that many have experienced and to their learning difficulties. From this very low starting point, the majority of students in each setting make at least satisfactory progress. Achievement is good for those students regularly attending ARC 25 where there are high expectations for them to do well. As a result, despite their low starting points, these students gain GCSEs and a range of other accreditation. For those regular attenders at other settings, achievement is satisfactory, although for the small number of poor attenders in each setting, achievement is inadequate. Overall, the majority of students gain passes in Entry level qualifications and level 1 and 2 courses. For those attending the YMCA centre last year, progress was unsatisfactory, but improvements to the curriculum this year have ensured that students are now making better progress in their learning.

Students are rightly proud of the progress they make in their vocational courses through college placements. Many are successful in these placements and go on to further education and training.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 3**

Students are encouraged to take responsibility for healthy living. They participate in a range of activities outside the centres and talk positively about these. They show an understanding of healthy foods and in some cases make healthy choices at meal times. Not all, however, make the best choices, particularly in the high sugar drinks they choose, and are hampered by the limited opportunities to learn to cook and cater for themselves in the centres.

Students talk positively about the fact that their behaviour has improved and that they have learnt to communicate better with adults. They have contributed to establishing the centre rules and show an understanding of the consequences of their behaviour. In college, older

students manage well in working alongside adults on their courses. For many, their attendance has improved from their previous settings and, although still not good enough, it is providing them with the opportunity to make progress in their learning. Students are becoming more involved in the community and have been participating in projects such as clearing brushwood in a park and working with the fire brigade teams on safety courses. Overall, students are gaining satisfactory skills to support them when they leave school and this is reflected in the fact that after a year, three quarters of last year's cohort are still in college or training.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 3**

Staff manage students well and establish positive relationships with them. Support staff are good at encouraging individuals to stay on task in lessons and use the time well to encourage students to talk and extend their understanding. All staff ensure that students know what skills they are expected to learn in each lesson but opportunities are sometimes missed to check on learning at the end of lessons. Good staff expertise encourages students to share their knowledge and understanding in discussions, for example about current political events and the importance of voting in elections. The quality of lesson planning, though, varies and does not always take into consideration the wide range of learning needs in each class. This is because assessment information and students' targets for learning are not consistently being used effectively in planning, and consequently work is not always sufficiently challenging for individuals.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

#### **Grade: 3**

The centres ensure that all students have opportunities to develop their skills in literacy, numeracy, information and communication technology, and personal, social and health education. The range of accreditation is being extended and the introduction of such courses as Certificate of Personal Effectiveness (CoPE) is appropriate. However, some students at the colleges feel they are not doing as well as they could because they do not have the opportunity to take GCSEs. Not all centres are ensuring that students receive their entitlement of 25 hours taught time per week. The local authority is aware of this and discussions are already in place to extend the teaching week. The centres make good use of the locality to extend students' experiences, such as visits to local museums and art exhibitions, and there are plans to make better use of local leisure and swimming facilities.

### **Care, guidance and support**

#### **Grade: 3**

Staff show considerable commitment and care for the students. They know the students well and have a good understanding of their various situations. The good links with a large range of agencies supports students' needs well. This is particularly evident in improving attendance, where although figures are low, they have improved a great deal over the last year. Checks for vetting staff and training for child protection are in place. Risk assessments are appropriate and students' safety is given high importance. The management of behaviour is satisfactory and enables students to develop skills in improving the way they interact with others. There are appropriate plans to ensure staff are fully trained in skills in managing the most challenging behaviours.

The quality of the guidance offered to students to enable them to improve their work varies within and across centres. There is some good practice where students record the work they have completed and can see what they need to do next, but overall guidance is not consistently helpful and in some cases, not all work is marked. There is a good format for individual education plans but their content varies in quality. In particular, targets are not always sufficiently precise so that progress can be measured. Students are not always aware of their targets or what they need to do to improve.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 3**

The high expectations of the Birchwood manager are ensuring that the centres are becoming more accountable and more consistent in their work with students. There are frequent meetings between the centre managers and the Birchwood manager, and the requirement for regular reports is encouraging managers to be more evaluative in their work. Quick action has been taken when provision has not been effective and new appointments such as in the management of the YMCA centre have had a positive impact in improving provision.

There are now systems in place that are enabling Birchwood to analyse data concerning students' progress. The information is beginning to be used to identify areas of development and set challenging targets. The process of self-evaluation is fairly new and currently Birchwood has a satisfactory understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. Centre managers are starting to develop clear ideas of what they need to do to improve provision and outcomes in their own centres, but they are not yet sufficiently involved in formally assessing strengths and weaknesses.

The management committee is quickly developing its role. The good links for example with mainstream schools are beginning to be used to support teaching and learning in the centres. There is an appropriate focus on developing community cohesion and an action plan has been established to promote this aspect 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	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

**Achievement and standards**

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards <sup>1</sup> 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

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<sup>1</sup>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.

## Personal development and well-being

<b>How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	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	3
The extent to which 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	3
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

## The quality of provision

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

## Leadership and management

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	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	3
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**

11 June 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Birchwood Alternative Curriculum PRU, Ashford, TN24 8XU

Thank you for making us so welcome during the inspection. We enjoyed the opportunity to talk to you during the two days and see you in lessons. We appreciated your honesty and openness in talking about Birchwood and you will see that some of your comments are included in the report. Overall, Birchwood provides you with a satisfactory education and you are making satisfactory progress in your learning. Here are some of the most important parts of the inspection report that I thought you might like to know about:

- Many of you are rightly pleased with how well your behaviour is improving.
- The curriculum is helping you to learn about life when you leave school as well as gain some accreditation.
- Staff have established good links with agencies which help support you.
- Birchwood is good at making sure you are well looked after and systems to keep you safe are good.
- Birchwood is well led and staff are keen to improve it further.

In order to make Birchwood even better, I have asked staff to:

- Help you improve your attendance rates, especially at the colleges, and ensure that the curriculum is well planned, challenging and interesting for you in all settings.
- Make better use of assessment information to set targets and plan work for each of you, and ensure that you know your targets and how to improve.
- Improve the role of centre managers in formally assessing the strengths and weaknesses of their centres in order to contribute more effectively to improving Birchwood as a whole.
- Improve the quality of accommodation for ARC 25 and ACYP to ensure that everyone has good quality space and facilities.

I wish you well for the future. You can help Birchwood by ensuring that staff are aware of your concerns and also by trying to eat more healthily. Also, do your very best to attend regularly.

Yours faithfully

Sarah Mascal (Lead inspector)