

Maidstone and Malling Alternative Curriculum PRU

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	135465
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	329099
Inspection date	21 January 2009
Reporting inspector	Helen Barter

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	11–14
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	46
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Headteacher	Adrian Young
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Bishop's Terrace Bishop's Way Maidstone Kent ME14 1LA
Telephone number	01622 772136
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Age group	11–14
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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 services for excluded pupils. Students attend one of three full-time education provisions in Maidstone which are commissioned by the PRU under contractual service level agreements: Kings Reach, UP2U Kent Safe Schools (UP2U) and Maidstone YMCA/Maidstone ARC (ARC). Three staff are qualified teachers. Eight staff are qualified trainers and tutors. All have experience of working with vulnerable young people. The large majority of students are boys and of White British heritage. No students are at the early stages of learning to speak English. More than half of the students are identified as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities, particularly relating to their behavioural, emotional and social needs. Ten students have statements of special educational needs. Six students are in public care. The manager of the PRU was appointed on 1 January 2009. There was interim management by the local authority after the previous manager left in June 2008. The position of chair of the management committee is vacant.

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(4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this pupil referral unit (PRU) requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The PRU is therefore given a Notice to Improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to the leadership and management of the PRU.

Despite the PRU's overall effectiveness and leadership and management being inadequate, it provides an acceptable standard of education. Students' achievement is satisfactory because experienced staff at each centre work well together as committed and motivated teams to help students improve their behaviour and attendance and engage in learning. Teaching is satisfactory, helping students, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, to make satisfactory progress, particularly in overcoming their social and emotional difficulties. Standards are well below average but, having achieved a range of accreditation appropriate to their needs and abilities, a large proportion of students go on to education, employment or training when they leave. The combination of these satisfactory outcomes for students means the PRU provides satisfactory value for money.

The curriculum satisfactorily meets the needs of students and helps to improve their enjoyment of learning as well as encouraging better attendance. It has a clear focus on teaching basic skills of literacy and numeracy while effectively promoting students' personal development and helping them to understand how to lead healthier and safe lives, particularly with regard to smoking, drug use and sexual health. While students undertake a wide range of work experience placements and work-related learning in the centres, the PRU acknowledges that there are not enough opportunities for them to gain accreditation in a wide range of vocational courses. Students' social and behavioural needs are assessed well by the centres when they start. Staff give good pastoral care, taking time to understand students' difficulties which have led to poor attendance and exclusions in their mainstream schools. However, the PRU does not have consistent systems or expectations for the way in which the centres assess students' academic abilities on arrival and track their progress through Years 10 and 11. Teaching and care, guidance and support are satisfactory, rather than good, because staff have limited, accurate information about students' progress to set individual learning targets which help students understand what they need to do to improve.

The PRU has had several changes in its management in the first year of its existence. This has hampered the establishment and implementation of formal systems to check systematically the quality of the work of the PRU as a whole, particularly in monitoring the quality of teaching and learning and the impact this has on raising students' achievement. As a result there are currently no measurable targets against which improvement can be assessed. There has been a lack of strategic direction from the management committee who have failed to offer challenge to the PRU, particularly in holding it to account for its performance. Nevertheless, the current satisfactory standard of education provided in each of the three centres, along with the newly identified and accurate key priorities for development by the PRU manager, indicates that the PRU has a satisfactory capacity for improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Introduce formal systems for monitoring and evaluating the work of the PRU which involve all leaders and managers, including the management committee, and that establish challenging and measurable targets for improving students' achievement.
- In particular, and as part of the above, implement systematic procedures to monitor the effectiveness of teaching and learning in improving students' progress in all centres.
- In addition, ensure staff in each centre make consistent use of information about students' progress to set individual academic targets which show students clearly how they can improve their learning and that are reviewed with them regularly.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Students make satisfactory progress although standards remain well below average due to the impact of long-term disruptions to their schooling in the past and the significant proportion who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Strengths within the teaching, particularly in supporting students' personal development, and a curriculum that is satisfactorily matched to students' needs and focused on improving their literacy and numeracy skills, mean that they achieve satisfactorily during their time at the PRU.

All students gain a range of accreditation including Duke of Edinburgh Award, OCN Bushcraft, First Aid and ASDAN - COPE (Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network – Certificate of Personal Effectiveness). Most students who are entered for GCSEs gain passes, although few gain the higher A to C grades. The emphasis placed on preparing students for the future through improving their behaviour and raising their self-esteem means that the large majority go on to education, employment or training.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Students make satisfactory progress in their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. They form good relationships with the adults who support them. Students learn to relate positively to one another, for example, listening respectfully when students read out letters written in a literacy lesson at UP2U and sensibly playing pool at break at Kings Reach. While students sometimes behave inappropriately, there are no permanent exclusions and fixed-term exclusions are low. This demonstrates that students understand what is expected of them, learning to improve their social and emotional skills so that their behaviour is satisfactory most of the time. They have a satisfactory awareness of their own and each other's safety. Students understand the advantages of healthy living and staying safe, with some aiming to give up smoking because they know of its dangers. They welcome the chance to participate in exercise, developing their expertise in activities such as canoeing and boxing. Students have satisfactory attitudes and enjoy most of the activities provided. They make a satisfactory contribution to the community, particularly through successful work-experience placements and within the PRU, such as painting murals to brighten a wall at Kings Reach. Although a student forum is developing at the ARC, formal opportunities for students to have their say about how the PRU can be improved in all centres are limited. Data show that attendance is satisfactory overall but there are no data to demonstrate that each individual student's attendance has improved from that in their mainstream school. Students acquire satisfactory skills to equip them for their futures, including experience of the world of work through work-experience placements.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Supportive teamwork between all members of staff is a good feature of teaching. All work very well to create a positive learning environment. Relationships between staff and students are trusting and supportive and staff manage students' inappropriate behaviour effectively when it occurs. The firm and sensitive approach adopted helps students to get back on track and engage once more in learning. This, combined with good subject knowledge, motivates students and helps them to make satisfactory progress in lessons.

Staff receive useful information from most mainstream schools about students' behavioural and personal difficulties, and devise satisfactory individual education plan targets that focus well on behaviour and students' attitudes to learning. However, although staff have begun to assess students' literacy and numeracy skills when they join the PRU, they do not have sufficient information about their prior attainment in mainstream schools to form a full picture about students' starting points. As a result, work is not sufficiently closely matched to the needs of individual students.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The local authority has established clear guidelines about the scope of the curriculum and its aim in helping students to progress to education, employment and training at the age of 16, rather than reintegrating into mainstream school. The curriculum provided follows the guidelines established but with shortcomings in opportunities for students to gain vocational qualifications. There is a satisfactory balance between the important subjects of English, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT), while also ensuring that students are helped to improve their behaviour and attitudes and get opportunities to learn about things that add interest and enjoyment to their lives. Personal, social and health education is integrated well into the curriculum and is incorporated into most lessons. Students enjoy activities outside the centres, such as football with students from another centre and opportunities to learn bush craft. Good use is made of community links to provide students with work-experience placements, such as with the post office and pest control services, and to help students gain skills for future work, including 'mock' interviews with a supermarket.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The PRU takes appropriate steps to ensure that students' day-to-day safety and safeguarding procedures meet requirements across the three centres. There are good procedures for dealing with inappropriate behaviour, limiting the number of students requiring exclusion and thus ensuring minimum disruption to their learning. The system of rewards, particularly at Kings Reach, motivates students and helps them to improve. The PRU works effectively with a number of other agencies in its support of students, using the fortnightly Alternative Curriculum Forum (ACF) well to discuss individual difficulties and identify where additional help might be required, either in the PRU or at home.

The procedures for guiding and supporting students' academic progress are insufficiently rigorous and consistent. The ACF, while supporting and monitoring students' pastoral care well,

is less effectively focused on how well they are doing in their learning. Lack of data about students' starting points and progress limits the capacity of all staff to analyse achievement and set precise individual targets which help students know what to do to improve. Imprecise targets such as 'complete coursework' or 'improve spelling' are apparent in too many students' individual education plans and are not based on accurate knowledge of students' learning through planned assessments or marking of work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 4

Staff have students' best interests at heart, working together well to help them engage in learning and have higher aspirations for the future. The PRU is knowledgeable of its community and its needs, and promotes satisfactory interaction and understanding between students and the local and wider community. This is particularly evident through the successful placement of students with local businesses and the participation of outside agencies in the regular forum meetings. The new manager has data about students' attainments and, combined with visits to the centres, has formed an initial overview of the key priorities for development. However, he has had insufficient time to act on these priorities and to monitor the quality of teaching and learning and its impact on students' achievement. In the first year of the PRU's existence, staff who are experienced in working with vulnerable young people have ensured, through their teaching and management roles, that the provision made for students and the outcomes produced have been satisfactory. As a result of satisfactory management within each centre, staff teams have been motivated and effective. Satisfactory informal monitoring at each centre, combined with the good level of staff experience, has enabled the centres to provide a satisfactory standard of education.

There are no formal systems for leaders and managers to evaluate the work of the PRU as a whole, although the centres have recently completed their own self-evaluation forms which satisfactorily evaluate the main strengths and weaknesses of their provisions. The PRU's view that its overall effectiveness is satisfactory, with good leadership and management, is inaccurate and insufficiently supported by well focused analysis of the information available about students' performance. The management committee has no formal records of its support or involvement with the PRU. The current vacancy in its chair means that there is lack of leadership in the strategic direction for the development of the PRU. There is no indication that the committee has an informed view of the PRU's strengths and weaknesses to enable it to set challenging targets for future 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?	4
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?	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	3
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	3
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?	3
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?	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	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	4
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?	Yes

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

22 January 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Maidstone and Malling Alternative Curriculum PRU, Maidstone, ME14 1LA

Thank you for making the inspectors welcome during the inspection and for taking the time to talk to us during the day. The PRU provides you with a satisfactory education and you make satisfactory progress in your learning.

Here are some of the important bits of the inspection report that I thought you might like to know about.

- Most of you enjoy going to the PRU and your attendance has improved since joining it.
- You get on well with staff and usually get on well with the other students too.
- Your behaviour is better at the PRU and not many of you have to be excluded.
- Staff care about you and want to help you to succeed.
- You enjoy opportunities to experience the world of work when you go out on placements and when people from different businesses visit the centres.

At the moment, there are some things to do with the way in which the PRU is run which need improvement. An inspector will come back in a year's time to check that things are in order and the PRU has improved. I have asked the PRU to:

- improve the ways everyone in charge checks on how well the PRU is doing so that they can set more challenging targets to measure how good the PRU is
- check regularly whether you are learning all that you should so that you achieve as well as possible by the time you leave
- use information about how well you are doing to give you targets to work towards that you understand and which you can talk about regularly with staff.

I wish you all well for the future.

Yours faithfully

Helen Barter Lead inspector