

Tonbridge, Tunbridge Wells and Sevenoaks Alternative Curriculum PRU

Inspection report

| | |
|--------------------------------|----------------|
| Unique Reference Number | 135467 |
| Local Authority | Kent |
| Inspection number | 329101 |
| Inspection dates | 20–21 May 2009 |
| Reporting inspector | Jeffery Plumb |

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 | 14–16 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | |
| School (total) | 57 |
| Appropriate authority | The local authority |
| Headteacher | Anne Lowry |
| Date of previous school inspection | Not previously inspected |
| School address | Bishops Terrace Bishops Way Maidstone ME14 1AF |
| Telephone number | 01892 534377 |
| Fax number | 01892 516203 |

| | |
|--------------------------|----------------|
| Age group | 14–16 |
| Inspection dates | 20–21 May 2009 |
| Inspection number | 329101 |

© Crown copyright 2009

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 two additional inspectors.

Description of the school

Tonbridge, Tunbridge Wells and Sevenoaks Alternative Curriculum Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) is a relatively new provision set up to support students who have been permanently excluded from school, or are at risk of permanent exclusion. It comprises five provisions: the commissioned YMCA Horizon provisions (which provide vocational courses on three separate sites); a commissioned West Kent College provision; and a provision called the Adolescent Resource Centre for the most vulnerable students managed by the local authority. A fourth Horizon provision is planned for September 2009. The provision manager, new in post, oversees and monitors the provision for students across all five settings. The chair of the management committee is new in post. Priority is given to students in public care and those leaving secure provision. Almost a quarter of students have additional educational needs and all of these are stated. There are very significantly more boys than girls on roll. Very few students are from a minority ethnic background, and none speaks English as an additional language.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a satisfactory PRU. On entry the vast majority of students have no time for school and are switched off from learning. This new, pioneering and innovative provision successfully re-engages the majority of them with learning and rebuilds their confidence and self-esteem, to the extent that they achieve well enough to go on to study meaningful courses at colleges of further education or get their feet on the rung of the employment ladder. This is no mean achievement. The parents of these students are delighted. They say, 'This PRU is life saving for our children and families, because it has turned our lives around.' However, a significant number of students do not attend regularly. These students underachieve significantly, and the analysis of attendance data is not sufficiently sharp to inform planning to improve the issue.

Those students who attend regularly take off with their learning, particularly those who follow vocational courses. For them the curriculum is relevant. The new, dynamic leadership of the provision manager has successfully effected change across all of the settings to benefit students, although inconsistencies remain and are not yet fully resolved. Teaching on the vocational courses has many strong features, but in the Adolescent Resource Centre for the most vulnerable students teachers do not consistently use assessment lesson by lesson to drive up achievement for all students. In addition, not all students in this setting access work experience. The newly appointed provision manager has formulated decisive action plans to address these deficiencies, but it is too early to evaluate the full effectiveness of these plans. Achievement is satisfactory overall, as is teaching, but a number of inconsistencies remain. Based on the positive impact of actions taken by the provision manager to date, the capacity for further improvement is satisfactory.

Students' personal development and well-being are satisfactory, as is the way they are cared for. Despite an earnest effort on the part of all staff, some students find it difficult to fully adopt a healthy lifestyle, but the provision is remarkably successful in supporting students with their emotional and mental health difficulties. As a result, their behaviour is consistently good. The provision manager is clear about what needs to be done to improve the provision, and is well supported by the management committee and local authority. A key priority is to urgently launch a common assessment system to be used across all settings to find out what gaps students have on entry in English and mathematics, so as to plan immediately to raise their achievement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve attendance in order to accelerate learning and raise achievement.
- Use assessment data consistently to better inform lesson planning, so that work more closely meets students' needs.
- Assess students' literacy and numeracy skills on entry and consistently track their progress over time in order to set them regular, challenging targets.
- Provide all students in the Adolescent Resource Centre with meaningful work experience so as to enhance their work-related skills.

A small proportion of the pupil referral units where 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

Overall, achievement is satisfactory. Those students who attend regularly make satisfactory progress in English, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT), but standards remain below national averages because of the significant gaps the majority of students have in their prior education. However, a significant hard core of students underachieve because of their poor attendance. Students following vocational courses, such as plumbing and electrical work, and who attend regularly make good progress in their acquisition of relevant work-related skills. They gain very creditable nationally recognised vocational qualifications, which open the door for them to access further education college courses or to get meaningful employment. For these students, re-engagement with education and finding a purpose again in their lives are mountainous achievements.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Students who attend regularly become enthusiastic learners who are keen to succeed. They enjoy the courses they follow and see them as relevant to their lives. Behaviour is good. Attendance is inadequate, because there is a significant hard core of students with poor attendance. The settings successfully promote students' interest in and commitment to adopting safe practices, as evidenced by their eagerness to wear protective clothing in the engineering workshop and steel capped boots on construction sites. Staff work ceaselessly to encourage students to adopt a healthy lifestyle, but a small proportion of students find it hard to quit smoking. The settings effectively support the majority of students in overcoming their emotional difficulties and by so doing remove a barrier to learning for them. The majority of students access good quality work experience which equips them with important life skills, except at the Adolescent Resource Centre. Students have many opportunities to express their voice, but there is no forum for them to effect change for the whole student body. Students respond well to the many opportunities provided for them to make a positive contribution to the community, ranging from the construction of a bridge at a nearby organic farm to the designing and erection of the local church noticeboard. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students is satisfactory.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Most teaching in the workshops sparkles. The vocational tutors have an enthusiasm for the subjects they teach and use their expert knowledge to enable the students to access learning through relevant work-related activities, which focus on their individual learning styles. The small size of classes enables tutors to know students well and they create safe learning environments where students are confident to try new practical activities for the first time without the fear of failure. This accelerates their learning. In a Year 11 plumbing lesson, students' engagement with problem-solving activities was excellent. Behaviour management is generally carried out skilfully and effectively. Most teachers use their individual knowledge of each student to plan activities which interest them and motivate them to learn. However, not all teachers consistently use assessment to plan the next steps of learning for students lesson by

lesson. Students are not always given clear and precise pointers as to what they need to do to improve their work. Assessment is not always used consistently well to plug students' gaps in literacy and numeracy, teaching lacks challenge. On these rare occasions students do not make sufficient progress and they underachieve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Flexibly planned and relevant, the curriculum successfully re-engages the majority of learners who attend regularly with education. It provides good pathways for them to enter further education college courses or employment when they leave. A significant strength is the fact that if students do not succeed on one course there is an option for them to swap courses, but careful consideration is taken by students, parents/carers and education staff in making such a decision. Accreditation opportunities are good. However, the most vulnerable students provided for in the Adolescent Resource Centre do not have the same work experience opportunities offered to students educated in the other settings. Not all courses offered are sufficiently attractive to girls, but there is a robust plan with a brand new course to be implemented next academic year to address this issue. There is a good focus on developing students' literacy and numeracy skills, but the programmes are not consistently challenging across all settings. Enrichment of the curriculum through extra activities is satisfactory, and suitable outdoor activities add to students' enjoyment of learning.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Child protection procedures meet government requirements. Risk assessments, including those relating to students' behaviour, are detailed. Students say, 'We feel safe and have an adult we can trust.' Students are well cared for, but transition arrangements do not always sufficiently prepare students for the reality of life beyond the security of the settings. Careers advice is satisfactory and improving. The number of students who entered employment or who embarked successfully on courses at colleges of further education when they left the settings at the end of the 2008 summer term was significantly higher than in the previous academic year. Links with a wide range of external agencies support students successfully in re-engaging with education, and so enhance their learning. For example, the partnership between the Youth Offending Team and education staff is excellent and has supported a number of students in sorting their lives out and getting back on track with realistic aspirations and goals to make a success of their lives. As recognised by the provision manager, there is as yet no consistent system in place for finding out what gaps students have in English and mathematics on entry to the settings, and no cohesive and consistent system in place for tracking their academic progress over time. There is a plan to address these issues, and new systems are to be implemented imminently.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The provision manager has, in a short space of time, brought about effective change which has benefited the students. Based on robust monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning, she has taken decisive action to bring about improvements, particularly in the Adolescent Resource Centre. She has successfully implemented improved management systems across all

settings and has established a dedicated team committed to removing barriers to learning for very vulnerable students. Her thorough evaluation identified the lack of a consistent assessment system to check students' literacy and numeracy skills when they enter the settings, and has led to an action plan to address this deficiency. Taking all staff with her has not been a mean achievement. However, analysis of attendance data to establish patterns to inform decisive action for improvement is not sufficiently sharp. A community cohesion audit has been carried out, but strategic plans to best suit the needs of all students are in the early stages of development. The management committee, whose acting chairperson was appointed during the same week as the inspection, is supportive, but not sufficiently challenging of the provision manager or the local authority. Governance in the context of this pioneering and innovative provision is satisfactory, and all parties recognise that much work still needs to be done to improve the quality of provision for some of Kent's most vulnerable students.

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 | 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 | 3 |
| 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 | 2 |
| The extent to which learners enjoy their education | 3 |
| The attendance of learners | 4 |
| 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 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? | 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 |

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

22 May 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Tonbridge, Tunbridge Wells and Sevenoaks Alternative Curriculum Pupil Referral Unit, Tunbridge Wells TN2 4PY

Inspectors enjoyed visiting you in your different settings and meeting with and talking with so many of you. The enthusiasm you show, particularly those of you following vocational courses at college and on the Horizon projects, demonstrates that you are keen to succeed. Across all settings your behaviour is good.

We think that your PRU is satisfactory. You are cared for well. Overall, your achievement is satisfactory, as is your teaching. Those of you who attend college and the Horizon projects regularly develop good work-related skills. However, the achievement of some of you is not good enough across all settings because of your poor attendance.

We have asked your provision manager to improve a number of things so that your PRU becomes even better. We have asked her to do everything possible to ensure that those students who do not attend the PRU settings regularly come in each day and so improve their achievement. We ask all of you to support your provision manager in bringing about an improvement in attendance. We have also asked her to improve teaching by making sure that all of your teachers make better use of what you already know and can do when they plan your lessons. We have asked her to find out the gaps in your literacy and numeracy skills as soon as you enter the different settings, and use information about your strengths and weaknesses in English and mathematics to plan to raise your achievement quickly. Finally, we have asked her to ensure that those of you who attend the Adolescent Resource Centre receive good quality work experience opportunities in line with your peers at the other settings.

We ask you to support your provision manager, staff and management committee in making your PRU a success.

Yours faithfully

Jeffery Plumb Lead inspector