

The Bridge School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	134321
Local Authority	Halton
Inspection number	341457
Inspection dates	13–14 July 2010
Reporting inspector	Terry McKenzie

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 of pupils on the school roll	28
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Jonathan Potter
Headteacher	Mrs Marcia Garnett
Date of previous school inspection	22 November 2006
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one additional inspector who observed six lessons taught by four teachers, and an assembly. He held meetings with parents and carers, pupils, members of the management committee, the School Improvement Partner and staff. The inspector observed the unit's work, and looked at documents relating to safeguarding policies, improvement plans and six parents and carers questionnaires.

The inspector reviewed many aspects of the unit's work. He looked in detail at the following:

- the attendance and punctuality of part-time and full-time pupils
- the attainments of full-time pupils and the progress that they make
- the impact of the curriculum on promoting the future economic well-being of full-time pupils and developing their basic skills
- the effectiveness of the unit in providing social education, care, guidance and support for full-time and part-time pupils.

Information about the school

The Bridge is a referral unit for Key Stage 3 pupils. It provides for a few full-time pupils who are permanently excluded from local mainstream schools. A second much larger group of pupils attend part time for social, emotional and behavioural support while their academic work remains the responsibility of, and continues at, their home schools. These pupils are at risk of exclusion or they experience difficulties in attending school regularly. They receive this pastoral support through dual registrations or by outreach work supporting pupils in their home schools and at The Bridge. The great majority have special educational needs and/or disabilities. The Bridge aims to return almost all pupils fully to mainstream education within three months. Consequently, the mobility of pupils is very high. Since the last inspection The Bridge has relocated to the current premises that it shares with the separate referral unit for Key Stage 4. Currently, all pupils are of White British heritage and most are known to be eligible for free school meals. Recent major changes in staffing have included the appointment of a new headteacher and deputy headteacher. The Bridge has maintained its Healthy Schools status.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

This excellent pupil referral unit provides outstanding academic education to full-time pupils and very high-quality social education and guidance to all groups. It is held in high esteem by the local authority and much valued by all partners. Parents and carers are delighted with the provision. They express their support, saying that the unit is highly effective in communicating with them and successful with their children during times of crisis in their education. Pupils attend willingly. They feel very safe, appreciate the high levels of support and contribute well in classes. Behaviour is exemplary making it possible for pupils to succeed in a wide range of activities. For example, full-time pupils undertake practical cookery on most days and demonstrate a mature understanding of the important role of food. This reflects the outstanding extent to which they adopt healthy lifestyles. Despite the challenges that prevent some from accessing full-time study, pupils make outstanding contributions through charity work and voluntary activities. Thus, they experience different communities, and through opportunities provided by the staff they learn about other people. Pupils, therefore, greatly improve their social skills and learn to work with others. This contributes strongly to their outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Lessons are well planned. The majority reach standards broadly comparable to those in mainstream schools nationally. However, some lessons do not have clearly focused learning targets so pupils sometimes experience less success in their learning than they should. The academic curriculum is outstanding while the social and therapeutic content is also of a very high quality. The outstanding management committee is rigorous in supporting and challenging the highly effective leadership team. In turn, leaders ensure that resources, including personnel, are utilised to the best advantage of all groups of pupils. The headteacher and deputy headteacher have clarity of purpose and this is shared by the staff. Morale is very high but teachers have skills, for example in behaviour management, that are not yet shared with colleagues in mainstream schools working with the same groups. Through regular review, The Bridge accurately gauges its strengths and weaknesses because quality assurance processes are accurate and equitable. Senior leaders have made significant changes for the better since the last inspection such as in the support so highly regarded by other local schools. They regularly review practice with the support of advisers and the School Improvement Partner. This leads to well informed action planning. Thus, the unit maintains outstanding capacity to improve.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

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- By July 2011, improve lesson planning to enable pupils to make even better progress by providing teachers with the training required to set clearly focused lesson targets for individual pupils.
- Further develop staff skills, and the confidence that they have in their practice, by encouraging teachers to share their expertise formally with colleagues in the mainstream schools.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**1**

Pupils settle quickly into lessons, willingly take part in the activities planned for them, and behave very well. Because of their previous difficulties in education, pupils' attainments upon entry to the unit are often below the national average for all schools. All groups, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress from their often low starting points. Thus, they rapidly close the gap with their peers in mainstream schools.

Pupils feel very safe at the Bridge. This is indicated through the responses provided by parents and carers and confirmed by the pupils themselves. Attendance is broadly average and improving rapidly since the last inspection; unauthorised absence is almost non-existent. Pupils arrive punctually and at the time of the inspection some arrived very early at the unit and were sometimes reluctant to leave at the end of the day. Pupils eat very healthily and make sensible choices about their lunches. Exercise is undertaken regularly through physical education programmes at a local sports centre and outdoor education. When it is appropriate to do so, pupils engage in different styles of learning related to their individual needs. For example, a canal boat initiative attended by some enhances self-esteem and encourages them to support each other in unfamiliar surroundings. Thus, pupils gain high-quality social, moral and spiritual experiences and reduce their stress levels through being out of the formal setting of the classroom.

Pupils contribute very well to the life of the unit and are keen to offer opinions. They support each other during lessons and at other times including assemblies and therapeutic sessions. Pupils undertake trips that support their learning and development. Some go on visits, for example through the canal boat project, in the local area and throughout the country. These valuable experiences provide opportunities for interaction with others outside of formal education.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

Teaching is good overall and some lessons are outstanding. Teachers know pupils well and plan lessons thoroughly to match their interests and abilities. However, teachers do not always set the clear learning targets for individual pupils that would help them to demonstrate further progress. In the best lessons, teachers guide and assist pupils, and this they do with great skill and care. Pupils form close working relationships with the adults who teach them and greatly benefit from this highly effective support. Most Key Stage 3 subjects are taught to full-time pupils and their studies are linked to the National Curriculum. New developments are planned to further enhance this range of courses and school leadership recognises that there is scope to enable pupils to gain external accreditations that would further motivate them and recognise their achievements. For part-time pupils highly effective social, emotional and behavioural learning programmes have been developed in cooperation with therapists and others. When it is appropriate to do so, pupils engage in different styles of learning related to their individual needs. For example, with the support of the unit some pupils attend the canal boat initiative. This helps them to develop knowledge and understanding of literacy and numeracy together with the practical and social skills that they need. All pupils have a study programme that is unique to them. Consequently, part-time supported pupils are able to continue working in their home schools rather than transferring to The Bridge full time. Thus, overall the curriculum is outstanding. New technologies are used very effectively; for example, in one lesson the teacher used the interactive whiteboard to provide an outstanding range of 'virtual' science activities that the pupils could readily engage with. Valuable nurturing activities such as the breakfast

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club are evident throughout the school day. These reinforce aspects of personal, social and health education and encourage pupils to take responsibility for their behaviour. Staff at The Bridge provide extensive guidance to help smooth pupils' transitions into and from the unit. They skilfully extend the support to parents and carers to enable this to happen collaboratively. Thus, pupils develop the skills and confidence to move on to the next stages of their lives.

Excellent relationships encourage pupils to share concerns with the adults that they trust. Staff work closely with each other and with other agencies and professionals to ensure that pupils spend as much time as possible in their education at The Bridge and in their home schools. Staff provide outstanding care and support throughout the unit. For example, they remain alert to individual pupils' medical, psychological and other needs and react quickly and appropriately to pupils in distress. Staff help pupils to feel positive about being part of The Bridge, both in-house and during outreach.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

Since the last inspection the new headteacher and deputy headteacher have greatly improved the quality of learning by ensuring that teachers use assessments more frequently and more effectively in their planning. Leaders skilfully appraise the work of the school to ensure that all have equal opportunities to progress and that none is discriminated against. For example, they have instigated individual curriculum pathways designed to provide opportunities for all to learn and make progress. Much has been done to improve the levels of attendance. For example, most pupils previously showed poor attendance in their mainstream schools. However, following their registration at the unit most improve their attendance to average or better.

Senior leaders appraise the work of the unit to ensure that all pupils have equal opportunities to learn and progress, and that none is discriminated against. The management committee is extremely loyal and supportive. Recent changes in its membership have produced an outstanding balance of experience and talents. Consequently, it acts as a highly effective facilitator between the unit and the local authority; and this has encouraged the development of the services offered by the unit. Furthermore, the committee supports senior leaders and checks very rigorously on their work. Safeguarding practices are good because policies and procedures are effective. Designated safeguarding staff and several members of the management committee

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have completed training to the statutory requirement and beyond. All aspects of safeguarding are undertaken with skill and experience. The Bridge places great importance on community cohesion and is very effective in promoting it. Senior leaders have undertaken careful planning to ensure that it is constantly reviewed and developed. Pupils are encouraged to maintain good relations with others from different backgrounds, for example, close contacts are maintained with organisations such as the police to help pupils to know more about public services. Parents and carers engage very well indeed with the school and are extremely well informed about the education and care their children experience. Staff make very good use of resources that include new technology. Classroom staff, both in-house and in outreach work, are deployed very effectively and to the benefit of all groups of pupils. The Bridge provides outstanding value for money.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	1
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Views of parents and carers

Questionnaires were returned from six parents and carers. Furthermore, two parents and carers attended a meeting and one telephoned the unit to speak with the inspector. Respondents are overwhelmingly positive about The Bridge and are very appreciative of the facility. For example, three parents and carers reported that the intervention of the unit with their children has helped to improve the functioning and stability of their families.

Parents and carers were keen to emphasise the excellent communications maintained by the staff. They firmly believe that this is a major contributor to their children's successful

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re-engagement with education and to the improvements that are evident in their attendance. The inspector agrees with these views, and the findings of the inspection support them.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at The Bridge School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspector received 6 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 28 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	2	33	3	50	1	17	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	4	67	2	33	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	3	50	3	50	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	2	33	4	67	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	4	67	2	33	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	4	67	2	33	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	3	50	2	33	1	17	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	4	67	2	33	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	4	67	2	33	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	2	33	4	67	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	3	50	3	50	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	3	50	3	50	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	4	67	2	33	0	0	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	51	45	0	4
Primary schools	6	41	42	10
Secondary schools	8	34	44	14
Sixth forms	10	37	50	3
Special schools	32	38	25	5
Pupil referral units	12	43	31	14
All schools	9	40	40	10

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above is for the period 1 September to 31 December 2009 and is the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn term 2009 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



15 July 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of The Bridge Pupil Referral Unit, Runcorn WA7 1PW

Thank you for making me welcome when I visited The Bridge recently. I enjoyed meeting you in your groups and classes. I was impressed by the Spanish meal!

The Bridge is an outstanding pupil referral unit. The adults care for you very well indeed and you feel very safe and secure. You appreciate the excellent relationships that you have with staff. Your contributions to The Bridge community are outstanding because you behave very well and you try hard to exercise and adopt aspects of healthy eating. You enjoy your lessons and are keen to learn about other communities in this country and abroad. The headteacher, staff and the management committee all work very hard for you. They work excellently with agencies and partners to give you the highest quality of guidance and support. This helps you to make good progress and to catch-up on some of the learning that you have previously missed. The Bridge also helps you by communicating very well with your parents and carers.

I feel that some improvements could still be made. For example, teachers could set better individual targets for you in your lessons. This would help you to know more about how much progress you are making. Also, I feel that your staff could help and advise teachers in other schools so that they could gain more understanding of the difficulties that pupils like you sometimes face in their education.

I wish you all the best for the future and once again thank you for your help and interest in the inspection.

Yours sincerely

Terry McKenzie

Lead inspector

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