

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



4 July 2017

Ms Rachel Meehan
Headteacher
Birchwood PRU
106 Cheriton Road
Folkestone
Kent
CT20 2QN

Dear Ms Meehan

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Birchwood pupil referral unit

Following my visit to your school on 23 June 2017, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in September 2016. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

At the section 5 inspection prior to that which took place in September 2016, the school was also judged to require improvement.

Senior leaders and the responsible authority are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- quickly establish a secure and accurate system of assessment, informed by pupils' previous attainment, needs and targets, which will enable all pupils to make the academic progress of which they are capable
- ensure that pupils who need to catch up with reading and basic mathematics are well-supported to do so

- extend the range of subjects on offer to provide pupils with more opportunities to succeed, sustain their motivation and prepare for their next steps in education or training.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, the welfare and attendance officer, the chair of the management committee and the local authority school improvement adviser. Her Majesty's Inspector also had telephone conversations with the lead tutor on the Romney Marsh site, the manager for alternative provision and the strategic lead for Kent pupil referral units (PRUs). A range of documentation was reviewed, including the school development plan, the minutes from management committee meetings and local authority reports. Her Majesty's Inspector observed teaching and learning in English and mathematics and sampled a selection of pupils' books. In addition, information about pupils' attainment and progress was analysed

Context

In April 2017, the headteacher left the school to take up another post. A new headteacher was seconded from a local mainstream school to lead the PRU until September 2018. Following changes to the local authority funding arrangements, the service level agreement with Charlton Athletic will cease from September 2017. A new team of teaching staff has been successfully recruited and appointed to start in the autumn term. The local authority has firm plans to relocate the PRU to more suitable premises and places will also be offered to pupils in key stage 3. A new attendance and welfare officer was appointed in January 2017. Since the last inspection the PRU has been based on two, rather than three, sites.

Main findings

Leaders and the local authority responded positively to the judgements made at the last inspection. Findings from the inspection confirmed leaders' own evaluation of the PRU's performance and have been used as a platform on which to base immediate improvements. Leaders quickly put together a detailed post-inspection action plan, which prioritised setting up a better system for tracking pupils' progress. Reviews of teaching and learning took place and clear areas for improvement were identified. As a result, there is a more overt focus on learning for pupils and for staff.

Following the departure of the previous headteacher, no time was lost in installing a seconded headteacher to keep up the momentum of improvement. She has built upon the work of the previous leadership by streamlining the urgent priorities for improvement. There is now a better balance of nurture and academic achievement for pupils in the school and as a result, teaching and pupils' learning have improved.

Expectations of what pupils can aim for and accomplish have been raised and most are beginning to respond well to the increased challenge. For example, pupils read more widely and write with greater confidence.

However, improvements to teaching, learning and assessment have not yet had enough time to translate into better outcomes for pupils. The headteacher and management committee have correctly identified that pupils' overall attainment is low. They have also acknowledged that not enough has been done to ensure that pupils with low literacy levels are provided with the right kind of help and additional support to enable them to catch up quickly.

Following the section 5 inspection, leaders rightly focused on the current Year 11 pupils to ensure that they completed their studies, took external examinations and were well prepared for their next steps. Nearly all pupils will be taking up employment, further education or training. Nevertheless, the headteacher knows that pupils, particularly those who are the most able, did not achieve their potential. The headteacher has also identified that pupils do not have enough opportunities to study a wide range of subjects and is wisely planning to introduce a broader curriculum.

Members of the management committee now focus more precisely on the progress that pupils make and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Members of the committee expect more from leaders, staff and pupils. They have also successfully changed the funding agreement for those pupils eligible for extra funding through the pupil premium. Mainstream home schools now pass on the pupil premium funding to the PRU, enabling leaders to plan spending more carefully and be held to account for its impact.

External support

The local authority have made good use of the previous inspection findings to reinforce their strategy to improve the performance and provision of PRUs across the county.

The local authority supported previous and current headteachers with developing the post-inspection action plan and making sure that improvements make a difference to pupils' outcomes. Local authority officers have carried out on-site reviews of teaching, learning and assessment and reviewed pupils' progress. A review of safeguarding in the school reassured the current headteacher that the school's systems to protect children are secure.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the management committee, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Kent. This letter will

be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Janet Pearce
Her Majesty's Inspector