

Thurrock Pupil Support Service

The Culver Centre, Daiglen Drive, South Ockendon, RM15 5RR

Inspection dates 13–14 November 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Not enough teaching is consistently good or better and a small amount is still inadequate.
- Teachers do not consistently use information about how well pupils do to plan lessons that help individuals learn in the right way for them.
- Pupils do not always do the best they can in lessons and over time. In particular, they do not do well enough in mathematics.
- Recent improvements in senior leaders' use of information about pupil progress are not sufficiently well established to be sure that the service is doing a good enough job in the long term.
- Despite a dogged determination to reduce high levels of absence, attendance overall remains low.
- Frequent changes of staff at all levels and in all areas of the service are unsettling for pupils, parents and staff.
- Although difficult behaviour is usually managed well, the management of behaviour is not always carried through consistently.
- The service has not published key information about its work online. This is a requirement.

The school has the following strengths

- The interim executive headteachers quickly identified what needed to be done to improve the service and acted on it. They have both worked tirelessly to put the right systems in place to begin to raise achievement.
- The standard of teaching has improved significantly from a very low point.
- A range of alternative providers is being used well to give pupils plenty of opportunities to practise skills that will be helpful in the future and gain useful qualifications.
- Good appointments of new senior staff have been made that are already starting to make a difference to how well the service is run.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 13 lessons across both sites. Ten of these were joint observations with senior staff. A learning walk to look at reading was carried out at the primary site. A visit was made to one of the alternative providers and an inspector spoke to another by telephone.
- Inspectors met with senior leaders and with staff responsible for assessment. They also met with pupils, a group of staff, a representative of the local authority and members of the management committee.
- There were too few responses from the online questionnaire for parents, Parent View, to give any information. However, the inspector took into account the school's own questionnaire to parents and telephone conversations with three parents. She also looked at the results of the school's questionnaires to pupils.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documentation, including information about pupils' progress, behaviour and attendance, performance management of staff, reports by the management committee and advice given by the school improvement partner. They also looked at key school policies.

Inspection team

Debra McCarthy, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Carol Evatt

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Thurrock Pupil Support Service consists of a primary pupil referral unit at the Phoenix Centre, a secondary pupil referral unit at the Culver Centre and a tuition service for pupils who are medically unwell, either at home or within a discreet setting within the Culver site. Pupils new to the service or who require additional intervention attend the assessment centre at the Bungalow.
- The service is currently run by two interim executive headteachers in a job-share role.
- Most pupils are boys and the vast majority of pupils are in the secondary department. Most are White British and speak English as a first language. A small number of pupils have a statement of special educational needs, mostly for behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. The remainder are supported at school action plus.
- Pupils attend the primary and secondary pupil referral units because they have been permanently excluded from their mainstream schools. Many have not attended school for long periods and have experienced disruptions to their education.
- Just under a third of pupils are known to be eligible for the pupil premium (extra funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals or who are looked after by the local authority).
- In addition to attending the main Culver site, older pupils are able to take work-related courses at a range of alternative providers, mainly BEP (Behavioural Education Programme), Motorvations, South Essex College, Gateway Connect, Circles Farm and Select Ed. A small number of pupils attend Action Learning, Rally Sport and Music Studio.
- The service has received approval to become an academy in April 2014.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise achievement across the service, and particularly in mathematics, by making sure that teaching is always at least good, in lessons and over time, through:
 - teachers consistently and clearly using information about pupil progress to inform how they plan lessons that meet the needs of each individual pupil
 - more frequent opportunities for teachers to share the best practice that exists in some parts of the service.
- Strengthen the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - developing a more creative curriculum so that pupils have access to a much wider range of subjects and opportunities that will prepare them even better for their place in society
 - ensuring that the systems for gathering data about pupils' progress and feeding information back to teachers is fully established, so that there is a clearer picture of achievement over time
 - ensuring that all the required information about the use of additional funding is published on the service's website.
- Increase overall attendance, particularly within the secondary pupil referral unit by senior leaders continuing to rigorously enforce the systems in place to reduce absenteeism so that attendance continues to rise and is at least 80% in the secondary pupil referral unit and 90% in the primary.
- Improve communication between senior leaders and staff to make sure behaviour management

strategies are consistently applied across the service.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils requires improvement

- Because teaching over time has not been effective, achievement over time is not good enough. Data about past pupil progress is limited and detailed information is only available for the last two years. It is only now beginning to be used more effectively to give a clearer picture of how well pupils are doing, but it is still early days.
- Pupils join the service with low attainment as a result of a disrupted education and low attendance. The ethos of the service is clearly about closing the gap and senior leaders are working hard to raise achievement.
- Although the standards reached by pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 are not good enough, they are improving over time. Whereas in 2011 no pupil gained five or more GCSE passes at grades A* to G, by 2013 this figure had risen to 32% with 8% gaining passes at A* to C. Most pupils left last year with at least one GCSE pass or equivalent. Additional vocational qualifications, particularly from alternative providers, prepare them appropriately for the future and work experience opportunities are good.
- There are pockets of good and sometimes better progress through the service. The latest school data show standards in information and communication technology (ICT) are rising although this is still hampered by the variable quality of available resources.
- Achievement in English is variable with pupils making good progress in Years 9 and 11, good and better in Year 8 but less so in Year 10. Apart from Year 9, who are now making better progress than they did last year, achievement in mathematics requires improvement.
- Subject leaders are beginning to use data to check how well their subjects are doing. Although there were concerns about achievement in science last year, most recent data suggests some pupils are making good progress with others even better.
- There was no great variation in achievement last year between groups, such as gender, children who are looked after, pupils with statements of special educational needs for behavioural, emotional and social difficulties and those at school action plus. There are no major differences between boys and girls, except that last year girls made much less progress in mathematics than boys. Appropriate interventions have been put in place to address this but the impact of this has yet to be seen.
- Previous progress data for reading, writing and mathematics in the primary pupil referral unit do not paint a favourable picture of progress over time, but there are doubts over the reliability over some past information. More recent data suggests a more positive outlook and that they are making adequate or better progress.
- Students known to be eligible for funding for the pupil premium made variable progress last year compared to their peers but the service is beginning to close the gap. Small numbers in some year groups mean it is difficult to give further information without identifying individuals. Information from the primary department points to the impact the funding has had for individuals in improving their attendance and academic achievement.
- Year 7 catch-up funding is used appropriately to provide additional support for a small number of pupils, particularly for numeracy and literacy.

The quality of teaching**requires improvement**

- Senior leaders' most recent checks this term show that the majority of teaching is currently good but that a small amount is inadequate and the remainder requires improvement. Inspectors found this to be just about the same during the inspection. Most of the teaching that required improvement was in the secondary pupil referral unit. This represents a significant but recent improvement in teaching. The school's own records from senior leaders' accurate monitoring show that last year most teaching required improvement or was inadequate.
- The quality of teaching continues to be affected by frequent changes in staff and a reliance on temporary and supply teachers to cover vacancies and long-term absence. Many of these changes have been a result of senior leaders' relentless pursuit of eliminating poor teaching.
- Too often teachers do not use information about how well pupils have done in the past to plan teaching that meets the needs of each individual. Even in some of the best teaching seen teachers did not use this information effectively.
- This situation is beginning to improve now that there are more regular meetings to make sure this information is shared, although the full impact of this has yet to be seen in lessons.
- Marking in books is good in the primary pupil referral unit and shows pupils clearly what they need to do to improve. However, this practice is not widespread across the service.
- Support staff are mostly well deployed in lessons but there are occasions when teachers do not make the best use of them. However, teachers are now working more closely with support staff to plan lessons.
- In the best teaching observed, teachers used questioning well to make sure that pupils understood what they have been taught and help them move onto the next steps in learning. They used a good selection of resources, including interactive whiteboards, to maintain pupils' interest and used time well.
- In the primary pupil referral unit, pupils were seen beginning to work together and supporting each other while they learnt about measuring perimeters and areas. This is not so prevalent in the secondary pupil referral unit where too often opportunities for pupils to learn on their own or from each other are missed.
- Sometimes teachers jump in a little too quickly and do not give pupils enough time to think their answers through. Others give just the right amount of help, for example in one mathematics lesson in the tuition service, a teacher skilfully built up pupils' confidence and subject knowledge. By the end of the lesson pupils were able to work out the problem themselves and explain how they did it.
- Teachers do not always plan enough opportunities for pupils to practise their reading, writing and number skills. Others make sure there are resources available to help them with this, such as in a history lesson where pupils read from a selection of old and new publications. In another, pupils read out the amount raised for Children In Need last year.
- The service carries out checks on the quality of teaching with its alternative providers. Recent checks showed that most were good but that some required improvement.

The behaviour and safety of pupils requires improvement

- The service's own evaluation of its work says that behaviour and safety requires improvement and inspectors agree.
- Pupils spoken to during the inspection felt that bullying was not really an issue within the service and felt confident that they could talk to adults about any difficulties. They said they knew how to keep themselves safe on the internet.
- Despite determined efforts by senior leaders and rigorously applied systems to check on absence and pursue non-attendance, figures remain low. This is particularly so in the secondary pupil referral unit and tuition service, although much of the absence in the tuition service is as a result of pupils being medically unwell.
- The service has increased the amount of education offered to pupils so now the vast majority of pupils access a full-time education. This is supplemented by the opportunity to attend a range of alternative provision; because it is mostly well planned, this has engaged pupils' interest and played a large part in improving their attendance.
- Pupils' behaviour in lessons is good where teachers actively engage pupils and maintain their interest. Sometimes, however, staff lack the confidence to challenge pupils with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties in case incidents occur and so do not stretch them academically as much as they could.
- Behaviour is mostly well managed by staff although some would like further training. There is sometimes a mismatch between the views of staff and senior leaders so that sanctions and strategies are not always consistently applied.
- Behaviour around the school is variable but mostly good. The school has an effective system of recording pupils' behaviour so that it can regularly check how they are doing. These checks show that over time pupils improve their behaviour, sometimes significantly. Exclusions, behavioural incidents and restraints are all decreasing.
- Members of the management committee who know the school well point to a much improved ethos within the service, one saying, 'It's the best the PRU has ever been.'
- The school's own survey of pupils suggests most feel safe. Most parents surveyed agree. Pupils spoken to by the inspector said they feel comfortable speaking to staff about their problems who do their best to support them.

The leadership and management requires improvement

- A number of changes in staffing at all levels have led to an unsettling time for the service. This period of temporary leadership is beginning to come to an end with a number of good permanent appointments to senior and middle leadership roles, including responsibility for assessing pupils' progress across the service. A permanent headteacher will start in January 2014.
- Recruitment difficulties and long-term absences have led to an over-reliance on the use of agency and supply staff, particularly in the secondary pupil referral unit.
- The two interim executive headteachers have grasped the issues of low attendance and poor

teaching they inherited and worked tirelessly to improve both. Although attendance remains low it has increased year-on-year and teaching is beginning to turn the corner.

- Senior leaders have accurately identified what needs to be done to improve the service and have made considerable strides forwards. Plans for improvement are firmly in place although the targets for success are not always sufficiently finely tuned.
- Not all staff are totally behind senior leaders and there is more work to be done to make sure everyone is 'singing from the same song sheet'. However, all staff agree that communication has improved recently and particularly appreciate the daily briefings each morning.
- The service receives valuable support from the local authority through its school improvement service although there have been three different school improvement partners over the past two years, making continuity difficult.
- The school has arranged to use the primary sports funding to provide weekly gymnastics coaching for Key Stage 2 pupils.
- Curriculum opportunities have been widened by the use of a range of alternative providers. The service recognises that there are still improvements to be made to the curriculum through a wider selection of subjects, particularly the humanities and creative arts, as well as further opportunities for educational visits.
- The service puts a high priority on ensuring all pupils have equal opportunities.
- Pupils have opportunities for spiritual reflection through weekly assemblies and special occasions, such as Remembrance Day. Moral choices are explored through lessons in personal, social, citizenship and health education and cultural issues through looking at African art. Sporting opportunities include canoeing and work experience at the local football club for older pupils.
- Safeguarding arrangements are good. Staff are well trained and know what to do to help keep pupils safe. Policies and procedures are thorough.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The management committee provides informed challenge to the service. Representation by the local authority makes sure that the service is well supported as it moves towards academy status in 2014. New members have brought additional skills to the service and they have taken on board their new responsibilities for funding.
 - The members of the management committee are aware of the service's strengths and shortcomings. They support the leadership's work in improving the quality of teaching. They understand the importance of the performance management of staff and the link between their classroom performance and pay. Procedures for the interim executive headteachers' performance management are well established.
 - Members of the management committee are informed about the progress pupils make and have some knowledge of the effectiveness of the pupil premium funding, Year 7 catch up funding and the new government funding for primary sports. However, they have not ensured that the service publishes the required information about the application of this funding online, as required.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	114702
Local authority	Thurrock
Inspection number	427149

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	5–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	101
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Chair	Karen Boyle
Headteacher	Thelma Bartlett, Mark Vickers (Interim Exec Heads)
Date of previous school inspection	6 December 2011
Telephone number	01708 853781
Fax number	01708 853267
Email address	tpss@thurrock.gov.uk

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