

Birchwood Pupil Referral Unit

Bowen Road, Folkestone, Kent CT19 2QN

Inspection dates

5–6 February 2019

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| Overall effectiveness | Good |
| Effectiveness of leadership and management | Good |
| Quality of teaching, learning and assessment | Good |
| Personal development, behaviour and welfare | Good |
| Outcomes for pupils | Good |
| Overall effectiveness at previous inspection | Requires improvement |

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The headteacher, senior leaders and staff form a dedicated team. They are passionate about equipping pupils with the skills and qualifications needed for the next stage of their education or training.
- The recent additions of a deputy headteacher and assistant headteacher have strengthened the leadership team. This is already having an impact. Leaders have the determination and capacity to secure further improvement in the school.
- Leaders have been developing a new assessment system to track progress and ensure that gaps in pupils' knowledge are identified. This system needs time to embed. Leaders are confident that the strategies and interventions to address pupils' areas of weakness will strengthen pupils' progress.
- Staff manage behaviour effectively. They provide essential support where and when it is needed.
- Pupils make significant improvements in their behaviour, personal and social skills, and emotional well-being. As a result, a large proportion of pupils have been able to re-integrate successfully into mainstream education.
- Pupils are well prepared for the next stage in their education. In 2018, all pupils gained an accredited qualification and went on to further education, training or an apprenticeship.
- The management committee supports leaders well. It provides appropriate challenge and supports leaders to drive further improvement.
- Leaders have been extremely successful in supporting pupils, who rarely attended their previous settings, to regularly attend school while at Birchwood. Leaders recognise that reducing absence and persistent absence will always be a priority.
- Teaching is good because leaders ensure that teachers receive appropriate training and support. Where teaching is not as strong, teachers need to provide more challenge and give pupils time to reflect on feedback.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve leadership and management, by:
 - continuing to develop the new senior leadership team to drive school improvement
 - embedding and further developing the assessment system so that it pinpoints the targets and interventions needed to strengthen pupils' progress.
- Develop the curriculum programme in key stage 3, so that it strengthens the skills that will support pupils' successful re-integration into mainstream education.
- Improve teaching, learning and assessment, by ensuring that all teachers:
 - have high expectations of what pupils can achieve and provide effective challenge
 - support pupils' understanding of their next steps, so that they can act on these to achieve well.
- Further improve attendance, by developing the school's work to address absence and persistent absence.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- At the last monitoring visit, the headteacher, at that time, was the only qualified teacher. The school now has subject specialists for English and mathematics and has extended the leadership team to include a deputy headteacher and assistant headteacher. The new senior leadership team is making a positive difference already. Leaders share the headteacher's vision for the school and, collectively, they have the determination to secure further improvements.
- At the time of the monitoring visit, the school's buildings were considered unsuitable for the education of its pupils. At the end of last year, the school relocated to the current buildings, which provide a much better learning environment. As with any new project, there have been teething problems and the school is still waiting for internet access to be installed. For many of the pupils, whose additional needs mean they do not cope with change easily, the move has not been welcomed. At first, pupils struggled to adapt to the new site and the changes to their normal travel routines. Staff have worked tirelessly to help pupils come to terms with the change. Pupils are now very settled and focused on their learning.
- Leaders show a thorough understanding of where the school is now and what the next stage of its improvement journey needs to be. They are passionate about the pupils they support. Leaders are determined to give every pupil the best chance to succeed in the longer term, whether that is back into a mainstream school or to further education, training or an apprenticeship.
- Staff morale is good. Staff recognise how the school has improved and feel rightly proud of their work. Morning briefings not only celebrate pupils' success, but also ensure that there is good communication between leaders and all of the team. This helps staff to feel well supported and ensures that anything related to pupils' needs is carefully communicated.
- The majority of pupils at Birchwood Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) are entitled to pupil premium funding. Pupils are dual registered and may only attend the school for a few months. As a result, the school gets limited funding for these pupils. Nevertheless, leaders have ensured that the barriers to learning for these pupils are identified and that additional funding is allocated to provide interventions, enabling pupils to make stronger progress. The impact of these interventions is monitored carefully, and support is changed, if it is not proving effective.
- Pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain through their personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education. Pupils learn to debate issues such as Brexit, as well as being taught about healthy eating and managing their personal finances. They also learn about social and personal issues related to the use of social media and the internet. As a result, pupils are able to make informed choices and keep themselves safe.
- The curriculum in key stage 4 enables pupils to join the school at any point and follow courses leading to appropriate qualifications. The school's careers education,

information, advice and guidance are very strong and, in 2018, all pupils successfully moved on to further education, training or an apprenticeship.

- Leaders recognise that it is vital for key stage 3 pupils to quickly learn how to manage their behaviour so they can re-integrate back into mainstream education. The management committee has agreed with the headteacher that, in the future, the school will only offer key stage 3 places in short blocks of either one or two terms. Leaders intend to develop a programme for key stage 3 that will equip pupils with the social, emotional and behavioural skills to be successful in a mainstream school.

Governance of the school

- The management committee is highly supportive of the school. Committee members have a wide range of skills and all have a background in education. The committee includes headteachers from local schools that place pupils at Birchwood PRU.
- The management committee and the school improvement partner visit regularly. They know the school well and have a clear understanding of pupils' outcomes and the impact of leaders' actions. The management committee and school improvement partner provide an effective balance of support and challenge to leaders. They hold leaders to account and set clear targets for the school's improvement.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- There is a very strong safeguarding culture within the school. Leaders and the management committee have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The school's recruitment procedures ensure that thorough background checks on staff are completed before they start their employment.
- Training is comprehensive and up to date, enabling staff to have a clear understanding of current legislation, the school's guidance and procedures, and their own responsibilities. This ensures that staff are proactive in dealing with any safeguarding concerns.
- Most of the pupils are highly vulnerable. Many pupils and their families either receive early help or have a social worker. The school uses an online safeguarding recording system to which all staff have carefully managed access. The system alerts leaders to all concerns that staff raise regarding individual pupils, and leaders ensure that appropriate action is taken. The school's records are meticulously maintained and referrals to external agencies, including children's social care, are tenaciously followed up.
- Leaders work with a range of agencies and are part of a local professions group. Collectively, they help the most vulnerable pupils. This ensures that these pupils and their families get the support they need. Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe when online and in the community. This enables them to make positive choices in their use of the internet and social media sites when they are at home. Pupils told inspectors that they feel safe in school and know whom to go to if they need help.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching is good because leaders make sure that teachers are given effective training and support. Leaders have ensured that every teacher has a comprehensive training programme, tailored to their own professional needs and to support the school's priorities. Those teachers who are not on the leadership team are at an early stage in their careers. They have benefited not only from leaders' guidance, but also from support and training offered by the mainstream feeder schools. Most teachers are highly responsive to the guidance they receive from leaders, and act on this positively.
- Where teaching is strongest, teachers relentlessly guide pupils to push themselves to achieve higher standards. Teachers have good subject knowledge and pupils are consistently shown how they can improve their work to get better results. Teachers ensure that pupils' misconceptions are addressed and provide feedback that allows pupils to see their next steps. Where teaching is not as strong, teachers need to further challenge pupils and ensure that pupils understand what they need to do to make good progress. All teachers follow the school's new marking and assessment policy, but some teachers need to make sure that pupils have enough time to respond to the feedback given, so that pupils can learn from their mistakes.
- Alongside the subject specialists for English and mathematics, the school employs an unqualified teacher and support staff who have been trained to teach pupils in small groups, delivering specific interventions and therapies. The combination of good teaching, interventions and therapies has enabled pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, to engage in learning. Pupils develop their social and emotional skills and make good academic progress.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- All pupils are provided with lunch, and staff and pupils enjoy breaktimes together. Staff are good role models. They take the time to talk to pupils, so that they really understand how pupils are feeling. Pupils relate well to each other as well as to the adults. Pupils appreciate the support and guidance they receive from staff.
- Staff and leaders know the pupils well. Leaders implement specific strategies to support the personal development of each pupil. A wide variety of therapies and interventions is used to improve behaviour and to develop pupils' social and emotional skills.
- Leaders provide good-quality careers advice. Advice is available for pupils in key stages 3 and 4 and is built on through the PSHE education curriculum. The careers adviser comes into school one day a fortnight and works with pupils, parents and staff. The adviser ensures that pupils have suitable places in further education or training, or are enrolled on an apprenticeship, when they leave Birchwood PRU.

- Pupils feel safe in school and staff teach them how to keep themselves safe in the community and when online. Staff identify pupils whose safety may be of concern and provide extra information and support to these pupils, when needed.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils' behaviour in lessons, before school and during unstructured times is good. Routines are embedded and pupils quickly settle into school, enabling an orderly and prompt start to lessons.
- Leaders have changed the way the school manages behaviour. The new policy was written following consultation with staff, parents and pupils and uses a positive behaviour approach. All staff are trained, so that the same consistent messages and responses are delivered. Leaders systematically track pupils' behaviour. Their analysis of behaviour is used to target support and interventions. As a result, the numbers of exclusions and incidents of poor behaviour have reduced substantially.
- Leaders and staff work tirelessly to improve the attendance of pupils. There are clear structures in place to follow up poor attendance, and staff work proactively to engage with parents in order to reduce absence. Many pupils at the school have significantly improved their attendance when compared with their attendance in their previous settings. Leaders recognise that as a pupil's attendance increases, they have more opportunities to make better progress. As a result, reducing absence and persistent absence will always be a priority for leaders.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Attainment on entry is very low for most pupils. Prior to starting at Birchwood PRU, pupils have often had negative experiences that have had an impact on their education. These include: managed moves between schools; difficult home lives; and little or no support for their learning needs. Such factors have resulted in many pupils having had significant periods of time out of education. Pupils arrive and leave the school at various points throughout the year. When a pupil starts at the school, leaders collate information from the feeder school. Leaders use this information and their own assessments of the pupil to establish a secure baseline from which progress can be measured.
- Leaders use this assessment information to set both expected targets and aspirational targets for each pupil. Where pupils have had gaps in their education, interventions are put in place to improve their basic literacy and mathematical skills. Interventions are also used to develop appropriate behaviours for learning. As a result, the vast majority of pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, make strong progress from their starting points. The school's assessment system has been introduced recently. Leaders recognise that the system needs to be developed further, and that staff need additional training, so that assessment information can pinpoint pupils' needs more precisely. This will result in even stronger progress.

- Year 9 assessment information shows that interventions and support have enabled pupils to develop the skills and behaviour to be effective learners. As a result, the school has been able to successfully transition pupils back into mainstream schools.
- The key stage 4 curriculum is designed to allow pupils, who arrive at different times of the year, to gain appropriate qualifications. All pupils take accredited courses, and staff work tirelessly with parents and providers to ensure that all pupils progress confidently to the next stage of their education, training or to an apprenticeship.

School details

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| Unique reference number | 135462 |
| Local authority | Kent |
| Inspection number | 10058137 |

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

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| Type of school | Pupil referral unit |
| School category | Pupil referral unit |
| Age range of pupils | 11 to 16 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 24 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Sonette Schwartz |
| Headteacher | Rachel Meehan |
| Telephone number | 03000 658450 |
| Website | www.birchwoodpru.kent.sch.uk |
| Email address | office@birchwoodpru.kent.sch.uk |
| Date of previous inspection | 20–21 September 2016 |

Information about this school

- Birchwood PRU is an alternative provision school.
- Since the previous inspection, the school has increased the range of its provision and now caters for pupils in key stages 3 and 4.
- The school offers places for up to 24 pupils in key stages 3 and 4 who have been permanently excluded, are at risk of permanent exclusion, or have become disengaged from learning in mainstream education.
- The majority of Year 11 pupils, and some Year 10 pupils, remain at the school to complete a range of qualifications, and then move on to further education, training or an apprenticeship.
- Other pupils in Year 10 and pupils in key stage 3 attend the school for one or two terms before returning to mainstream education.

- Most pupils have experienced disruption to their education or have refused to attend school in the past.
- There are more boys than girls at the school.
- The number of pupils who are disadvantaged and supported through the pupil premium is above average. The school does not receive the premium for all pupils who are dual registered, which is the vast majority of pupils.
- The school moved to new, more suitable premises in November 2018.
- A new, substantive headteacher was seconded in April 2017 and became substantive from September 2018.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in all key stages and year groups. All lessons were visited jointly with senior leaders. Inspectors and leaders carried out a joint scrutiny of pupils' work, covering all year groups and subjects.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, senior leaders, the management committee and with representatives of the local authority. Meetings were also held with senior leaders to talk about their areas of responsibility.
- Inspectors took account of two responses recorded on Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, including one free-text comment.
- The views of staff were gathered through meetings with groups of staff and by taking account of the eight responses to Ofsted's online staff questionnaire.
- Inspectors met with a group of pupils and spoke to pupils in lessons and around the school.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documentation, including: the school's self-evaluation; the school improvement plan; an analysis of the school's performance data; information relating to the attendance and behaviour of pupils; safeguarding and child protection records; the curriculum; the school improvement partner's evaluations of the quality of teaching over time; and minutes from the management committee's meetings.

Inspection team

Susan Conway, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

John Bosley

Ofsted Inspector

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