

Rochdale Pupil Referral Service

Heights Lane Site, Heights Lane, Rochdale, OL12 0PZ

Inspection dates 14–15 November 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The encouraging and caring atmosphere at all three sites nurtures pupils' self-esteem. Pupils say that they feel safe in school and that their concerns are understood.
- Strong links with other agencies and the high level of support for families are key factors in re-engaging pupils in learning and increasing their attendance. A fair number of younger pupils return to mainstream schooling.
- Good and sometimes outstanding teaching ensures that, from often low starting points, pupils of all ages make good progress. Pupils start to see value in learning.
- Most Year 11 students leave with numerous qualifications and take up places in college, training or employment.
- In lessons, pupils generally participate and behave well, especially when they find the activity interesting and within their grasp.
- Highly effective teamwork and calm, skilful handling of pupils' behaviour and concerns, with an emphasis on helping pupils to respect themselves and others, lead to trusting relationships between pupils and adults.
- Strong leadership, effective support for inexperienced staff and a shared commitment among all staff to doing everything possible to keep pupils in education, result in improving provision which is well tailored to individual pupils' needs and interests.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Not all staff consistently expect enough of pupils: a few accept less than pupils' best in quality and quantity of work. As a result, there is headroom for higher achievement.
- Teachers' marking does not always balance praise well enough with clear points showing pupils what they need to do better.
- Leaders and managers have not rigorously used information from reviewing pupils' learning to set specific targets for improvement in listening, speaking, reading, writing and mathematics. As a result, small but significant steps in pupils' progress sometimes go unrecognised or are missed as a platform for further learning.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited all three sites (Darnhill, Heights Lane and Year 11 Centre) and observed six sessions, one jointly with the headteacher.
- The lead inspector undertook two learning walks at the Darnhill Centre, one with the headteacher and the other with the assistant centre manager, and visited all sessions as well as seeing break-time and end-of-day arrangements.
- An inspector visited Hopwood Hall College where Year 11 students were undertaking vocational programmes.
- Inspectors met with a group of Year 11 students and also spoke with individual pupils at Darnhill and Heights Lane Centres.
- Two primary and four Key Stage 3 students were heard reading. Inspectors looked at work from a sample of pupils, the school's records of pupils' progress and other documentation, including that relating to safeguarding and school improvement.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher and centre managers, the school nurse, a careers advisor, the work experience coordinator, three members of the governing body including the Chair, and the school improvement officer from the local authority.
- There was no response to the online questionnaire for parents (ParentView). The lead inspector met with four parents and carers of pupils who attend the Darnhill Centre.
- The inspectors took into account the responses of 58 members of staff who completed the questionnaire.

Inspection team

Sonja Øyen, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Alastair Younger

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Rochdale Pupil Referral Service (PRS) is part of Brownhill Learning Community, a soft federation with Brownhill School, a school for pupils with behavioural, emotional and social needs. PRS and Brownhill School have senior management, staff and a governing body in common but retain separate official identities. Brownhill School was inspected in September 2013.
- Since the previous inspection in June 2011, PRS has moved into new buildings at the Darnhill and Heights Lane sites, shared with pupils attending Brownhill School. The former Saxon Centre has been refurbished and re-named the Year 11 Centre. Each centre has a centre manager. The headteacher is running the Darnhill Centre in the manager's absence.
- All pupils have been excluded from mainstream schools and many travel some distance to attend PRS. The vast majority are of White British heritage. Boys outnumber girls considerably although this is less marked in Year 11. Five pupils are currently in the care of the local authority.
- A higher proportion of pupils than average is eligible for pupil premium funding, the additional funding from the government for those pupils eligible for free school meals, children looked after by the local authority and those from service families.
- PRS takes in pupils throughout the year. The centre pupils attend reflects the outcomes of an initial assessment of pupils' vulnerability and their social and emotional needs as well as pupils' preferences. At the time of the inspection, there were 15 pupils from Years 2 to 11 at the Darnhill Centre, 26 students from Years 8 to 10 at the Heights Lane Centre and 20 students at the Year 11 Centre. Five pupils were being educated off-site and nine pupils were dual-registered at PRS and at a mainstream school.
- During the two days of the inspection, Year 11 students were undertaking vocational courses both in-house and at other providers, including Hopwood Hall College and KickStart Middleton.
- Three newly qualified teachers joined the staff in September 2013.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen the overall quality of teaching, and so increase the rate of pupils' learning, by:
 - ensuring all staff have the highest expectations of what pupils can achieve
 - sharing best practice in marking pupils' work to highlight exactly what pupils need to do to improve
 - identifying and recording rigorously each pupil's progress in listening, speaking, reading, writing and different aspects of mathematics to inform the planning of individual learning programmes.
- Sharpen the quality of leadership and management at all levels by:
 - specifying clearly the expected impact for pupils of planned improvements to provision
 - shifting the focus of monitoring by senior managers to assessing how well pupils learn and the factors that account for it.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- A key success is the re-engagement of most pupils in learning. Pupils relatively new to PRS at the time of the inspection were settling well into the routines and participating in lessons. For some pupils, this was a significant step forward having been erratic, low- or non-attenders at one or more mainstream schools.
- Although attendance improves markedly for a good proportion, with some pupils showing almost 100% attendance, others continue to find it hard to attend regularly despite the best efforts of staff to ease them back into schooling and to tailor teaching to individual needs. As a result, progress varies considerably from pupil to pupil irrespective of background and age. On balance, it is good overall given pupils' often low starting points in personal and social skills and academic attainment. Parents and carers commented on the positive changes they had noticed: 'Life is a lot easier.' and 'going to school and now talking about it. Brilliant!'
- Data from the school's assessments of pupils' abilities and attainment on entry show most pupils are often one, two or three years behind in reading and writing. Regular reading sessions and support for pupils to plug gaps in their knowledge of phonics (the links between letters and sounds) result in accelerating achievement in reading. The introduction of e-books is proving effective in encouraging older pupils to tackle lengthy stories.
- The school's records show that progress accelerates once pupils settle and see value in learning. Those who are at PRS for some time often go on to make better than expected progress. For example, some Key Stage 2 and 3 pupils who have been at PRS for two terms plus have made up to two years' progress in spelling and reading comprehension.
- In 2013, most of the Year 6 pupils attained the level expected for their age in mathematics and science but not in reading and writing, despite noticeable progress.
- As in 2012, the vast majority of Year 11 students left in 2013 with a number of qualifications. A few consciously decided not to take tests. Although some students gain GCSE and other qualifications in Year 10 at a mainstream school, not many choose to retake and improve their results. Forty per cent attained at least one GCSE and a small number of able students gained good passes; two gained at least five. In addition, more students gained passes in functional skills in English, mathematics and information and communication technology, and some also gained passes in BTEC courses, such as building crafts, taken at other providers.
- A key strength of PRS is that Year 11 students are prepared well for the world of work. In their final year, they take on more responsibility for their actions, such as returning to the Year 11 centre in time for afternoon sessions. Nearly all leave to take up places in education, employment or training. Staff continue to work with those who are slow or reluctant to apply and support them in their applications and interviews.

The quality of teaching is good

- Over time, teaching is good although in lessons it varies with some that is outstanding and some that requires improvement. This partly accounts for inconsistencies in pupils' progress and in their attitudes towards learning in lessons. Common strengths, however, are the positive relationships between staff and pupils, the repartee and encouraging remarks that often make the difference to a pupil engaging in the activity or not.
- The most effective teaching is lively, enthusiastic and decisive. Pupils rise to teachers' high expectations of their conduct and work rate. They apply themselves to the task, respond to questions and share their ideas. Students from Years 7 and 8, for example, were absorbed in reading and listening to others read. They applied their skills of skimming and scanning because the teacher's constant praise and prompts motivated them to find answers to the set questions.
- Teachers' planning takes account of individual needs although the challenge is not always high

enough with resultant work being praised unduly during lessons and in teachers' marking. The most effective marking makes clear what has been done well and what needs to be better.

- Staff are very aware of individual pupils' preferences and adapt to them, such as minimising distractions for some and offering the use of tablet computers to pupils who find writing a chore. They continuously review and assess pupils' progress against targets and expectations of progress although these are not always specific enough especially in speaking and listening. Parents, carers and pupils are kept well informed about where improvements are being made and also where there may have been some steps back. In some cases, this leads to a formal assessment of educational need.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Given that pupils have been excluded from mainstream schools most often for totally unacceptable behaviour; they behave well in lessons, in school and at other providers, especially when they are 'hands-on'. A good example was the exemplary behaviour of a small number of very responsive Year 11 students working on computerised spread-sheets. Anecdotal evidence highlighted the compliments paid to pupils on their mature behaviour during activities outside school such as ocean sailing and reading to young children.
- The marked change in attitude and behaviour of many pupils reflects the positive stance of staff in taking an interest in pupils as individuals. Pupils respond to the frequent praising comments and value the rewards to be gained from behaving well.
- Pupils know about rights and responsibilities. They accept the handing-in of personal items on arrival each day at school and have agreed their own class rules, although not all abide by them consistently. They know that swearing, poor behaviour and attitude are 'wrong'. They accept being taken out of sessions for short periods to calm down. Younger pupils commented that treatments, such as head massage, helped them. They also commented that older pupils 'look out for us', especially during play outdoors. Pupils say that bullying is 'not an issue'. They feel safe; they have made friends and know that staff supervise them closely and are there to help.
- Some pupils find it hard to control their emotions and there are occasional outbursts. The calm, skilful handling of such incidents by staff enables other pupils to continue working. Nevertheless, the extremely challenging behaviour of some pupils towards others has of necessity resulted in exclusion for short periods. The school's data from this term indicate a reducing number of days lost to exclusions when compared with the same period last year.
- Year 11 students value their centre; they like the informality and the adult way they are treated.
- Attendance has improved markedly for one in three pupils this term but remains lower than average overall although that of pupils in the care of the local authority is higher.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher knows her school well. Self-evaluation is accurate and robust, with relevant priorities for improvement reflecting the developing entity of Brownhills Learning Community.
- The headteacher is ably supported by governors and a skilled team of teaching and non-teaching staff who share her vision. As one commented, 'All pull together.' The 58 staff who returned the questionnaire were almost unanimous in their positive agreement on all aspects.
- Effective day-to-day management ensures that each centre runs smoothly. The governing body and headteacher have made prudent decisions in appointing staff with subject expertise, such as physical education, and in allocating staff to each centre to give strength in teaching with mentoring for less experienced staff. However, checks on the quality of provision have focussed more on teaching skills than on the quality of pupils' learning. Improvement planning similarly lacks specific, measurable targets in expected outcomes for pupils although it is clearly focussed

on strengthening provision.

- Safeguarding is given high priority. All statutory requirements are met and training sessions ensure that staff are updated on safeguarding procedures, including those related to e-safety and child protection. Regular meetings and reviews ensure that all staff are aware of issues concerning pupils and the steps being taken, often involving several outside agencies, to keep pupils in school. The intervention team plays a vital role in making and keeping contact with hard to reach families and in working with all families to encourage pupils' regular attendance.
- The setting up of the parent forum, where family members can meet staff informally and take part in different activities, has got off to a valued start.
- Consistency in ways of working is rightly being promoted and checked. The assessment leader has given a strong steer in setting up portfolios of pupils' progress. Examples seen varied in content and detail. The clear link between the assessment of pupils' social, emotional and behavioural needs with individual education and behaviour management plans was not always as evident between the assessment of learning needs, learning plans and samples of completed work. The omission of information in some portfolios regarding pupils' strengths and specific weaknesses in speaking and listening, reading, writing and mathematics narrows the overview of pupils' progress. It also means that intervention work, especially with regard to helping pupils to catch up in reading, is not explicitly recorded.
- The curriculum has a strong emphasis on personal and social education as well as on basic skills in literacy and numeracy. Pupils' work from projects linking subjects is attractively displayed at Heights Lane centre; there is scope to make more of the environment at the other two sites.
- A particular strength is the care given to advising pupils on avenues open to them, with several periods of work experience before pupils choose a vocational programme.
- The governing body, headteacher and other senior leaders have benefited from support from the local authority in managing the move to new accommodation, the 're-launch' of Brownhills Learning Community and the setting of priorities and budget plans. In buying additional time from key local services, PRS ensures pupils and families have ready access to specialist expertise in social, health and training concerns.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors are supportive and knowledgeable about the school and the differing needs, circumstances and outcomes for pupils. They are holding leaders to account and questioning the links between the outcomes for pupils and teaching. They have sought additional governors with particular expertise to strengthen the effectiveness of committees. They are challenging the local authority concerning the poor delivery of information technology services.
 - The governing body is new to managing a school budget and is working with the business manager to gain a detailed overview of the impact of the use of pupil premium funding and also the planned use of additional monies to improve sports for the primary pupils. Evidence shows that additional funding to support visits and activities, such as go-karting and the summer Girls' Group, pays off well in pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

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	133409
Local authority	Rochdale
Inspection number	426337

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	4–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	75
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Rosemary Jones
Headteacher	Kate Connolly
Date of previous school inspection	21 June 2011
Telephone number	0300 303 8384
Fax number	-
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