

Stafford Pupil Referral Unit at the Stables

The Stables, The Hollies, Stafford, Staffordshire ST16 1BY

Inspection dates

3–4 July 2018

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an inadequate school

- Leaders and the school's management committee have not ensured that safeguarding procedures are sufficiently robust.
- The management committee has not focused enough on challenging leaders to improve pupils' outcomes and increase attendance.
- Leaders' plans for improvement lack precision and do not identify clearly how they will know if they have been successful in achieving their aims.
- Pupils' attendance, including those children looked after, is poor. This is exacerbated by the high number of pupils who attend school on a part-time basis.
- Due to the limited time most pupils spend in school, many miss chunks of education and make inadequate progress in their learning.
- Teaching has not been consistently effective over time. Consequently, pupils are not achieving as well as they could, and they are not well prepared for the next stage of their education.
- Pupils' assessment information is not used effectively to plan learning which specifically addresses pupils' individual difficulties, including those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities.
- Teachers do not meet consistently well the needs of the most able pupils. As a result, these pupils do not attain the standards of which they are capable.
- Pupils' behaviour is improving, although not all staff apply the school's agreed approach to behaviour management consistently.

The school has the following strengths

- The new headteacher has already taken positive action to address some of the school's weaknesses.
- As a result of leaders' recent work, the quality of teaching is improving. Current pupils are becoming more engaged in their learning.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well. Alternative provision is carefully matched to pupils' needs and interests.
- Staff work hard to establish strong, supportive relationships with pupils.

Full report

In accordance with section 44(2) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than it might in all the circumstances reasonably be expected to perform.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Urgently address the serious weaknesses in the school's safeguarding arrangements by:
 - reducing the number of pupils on part-time timetables
 - working closely with local authorities to ensure that children looked after receive their entitlement to a full-time education.
- Improve the attendance rates of all pupils so that they attend school regularly by implementing and embedding recently planned strategies to raise levels of attendance.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - sharpening improvement plans to ensure that actions are specific and include clear, measurable criteria for determining success
 - ensuring that there is consistency in the staff's application of the school's behaviour management policy
 - embedding the revised assessment procedures so that pupils' progress is monitored carefully and used to set high expectations
 - ensuring that members of the management committee hold leaders to account for raising pupils' achievement and rapidly increasing levels of attendance.
- Secure at least good teaching, learning and assessment to improve outcomes for all pupils by:
 - making sure that all teachers have consistently high expectations of pupils
 - ensuring that teachers use assessment information well to match learning tasks more closely to pupils' individual needs and capabilities
 - providing an appropriate reading programme, complete with resources, to address the needs of pupils with poor literacy skills
 - creating better opportunities for the most able pupils to tackle more challenging work to enable them to attain higher standards
 - ensuring that staff know, and take into account when planning for, the specific needs of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Inadequate

- Since the time of the school's last full inspection, standards have been in decline. Until recently, leaders and the school's management committee have been ineffective in halting the deterioration in pupils' achievement. Over time, leaders have not focused their attention closely enough on ensuring that pupils attend regularly and secure good outcomes. However, leaders' convincing actions are now bringing about improvements.
- Despite the school's limited physical space, leaders, the management committee and the local authority have all allowed an ever-increasing number of pupils to join the school. Leaders have, to some degree, managed this by placing pupils on part-time timetables. However, they have not ensured adequate safeguarding arrangements for these pupils.
- Leaders have an overarching view of the school's main strengths and areas for improvement, although, sometimes, they do not narrow down, with sufficient precision, the specific weaknesses that need addressing. As a result, improvement plans are not focused tightly enough on what the school needs to do to improve. In addition, plans lack measurable criteria to enable leaders to evaluate effectively how successful they have been in resolving weaknesses.
- Over time, leaders have not done enough to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. A period of weak leadership in the past, inadequate teaching and a lack of focus on pupils' progress led to a decline in standards, poor behaviour and shortcomings in safeguarding arrangements. However, the positive actions of the new headteacher have gradually started to reverse this dismal picture of pupils' achievement and behaviour.
- During the headteacher's period of acting headship, she worked hard to challenge underperformance and eradicate inadequate teaching. This led to significant changes in staffing which, while necessary, have, to some extent, hampered leaders' efforts to gain consistency in the quality of teaching. Nevertheless, staffing has now stabilised, enabling leaders to implement approaches to teaching more systematically. Leaders have established an appropriate system for checking on the effectiveness of teachers' work. This is helping to bring about faster improvements in the quality of teaching.
- Assessment practice across the school, while improving, is underdeveloped. Pupils' assessment information is not used well to set high expectations about what pupils should achieve. Very recently, leaders revised the school's assessment arrangements. However, the new system has not yet been fully implemented. Therefore, the analysis of pupils' progress over time does not yet provide leaders with a complete picture of achievement.
- The curriculum includes a limited range of subjects, which restricts some pupils from continuing to study for qualifications that they have already started at their previous school. Consequently, pupils who return to mainstream education may develop further gaps in their knowledge and understanding. Leaders recognise this problem and have made arrangements to expand the range of subjects on offer from September 2018.
- The leadership of provision for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is improving.

Leaders have an understanding of pupils' individual needs, although they do not gather information about, or evaluate the effectiveness of, the different interventions and support offered. For example, leaders were unable to demonstrate how information on education, health and care (EHC) plans is applied in practice by teachers to support pupils' progress.

- The headteacher has successfully built the confidence of the staff team. She has identified potential leadership talent and empowered the staff to devise and develop their own strategies, leading to improvements. The staff have already made some positive changes to practice, which are supporting better-quality teaching. Leaders have a clear vision for the future.
- The headteacher has wasted no time in beginning to address most of the areas for improvement that were identified at the inspection in February 2018. For example, there has been a significant improvement in the leadership of English, which has, in a short time, brought about some noticeable improvements to the teaching of writing.
- Very recently, leaders have paid much greater attention to the needs of disadvantaged pupils. All of these pupils now have an individual plan to target additional funding more appropriately to meet their needs. However, it is too early to see the effect of these plans on pupils' outcomes.
- Leaders have thought carefully about the alternative provision placements on offer to make sure that they match the needs and interests of pupils. Pupils benefit from attending these placements and develop greater engagement in their learning.
- According to the school's own parental questionnaire findings, parents and carers are generally positive about the school. Parents say that they are kept well informed.

Governance of the school

- The school has a management committee that performs very similar functions to a governing body. In the past, management committee members did not act quickly enough when there was evidence of a decline in the school's performance. They have not ensured that safeguarding arrangements are effective, that pupils attend regularly or that pupils are taught consistently well so that they can make good progress.
- While members have an overview of the school's performance, they have not provided enough challenge to leaders about pupils' outcomes or low rates of attendance.
- The management committee understands the challenges ahead and is now kept well informed by the headteacher about the school's progress. Members are becoming better at questioning leaders about pupils' achievement and holding leaders to account. Members visit the school and this enables them to form their own independent view of the school's work. Members have a strong handle on the school's finances.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective.
- Leaders have not taken adequate measures to ensure that the many pupils who attend school on a part-time basis are safeguarded appropriately. Pupils told inspectors that during the day, when not in school, they rarely complete school work at home. Some

say they go out and meet with friends. This poses a significant safeguarding concern.

- Leaders adopt rigorous safer recruitment practices. They have ensured themselves that all the necessary pre-employment checks have been carried out and those working with pupils are safe to do so.
- All staff are very clear about the school's procedures for reporting any concerns about pupils' safety or welfare. This system has recently been overhauled to make it even more efficient. Leaders keep accurate safeguarding records which demonstrate that they take prompt action when a concern is raised.
- Through the personal, social and health education (PSHE) curriculum, leaders have ensured that pupils are taught how to keep safe and understand the dangers from current issues, such as knife crime and gang involvement. During the inspection, pupils discussed ways to keep themselves safe during the summer holidays. This included a focus on water safety in response to a recent tragedy involving a teenager reported in the media.
- All staff receive regular and appropriate safeguarding training, which they apply well. This helps them to remain ever-vigilant and know how to respond quickly and sensitively should the need arise.
- Leaders have a coherent approach to making clear their expectations of alternative providers in relation to the safeguarding of pupils.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- At the start of the academic year, the new headteacher identified some serious concerns with the quality of teaching. She rightly focused her energies on setting clear expectations to address weaknesses in teaching. Now, the quality of teaching, while not consistently good, is improving because of the strategies that leaders have introduced.
- Teachers do not use assessment information consistently well or take sufficient account of pupils' specific learning needs, including those outlined in EHC plans, when planning programmes of work. This means, for example, that the needs of those pupils who have gaps in their basic literacy skills are not always well met. Similarly, there is not enough challenge for the most able pupils in lessons.
- Teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are, on occasion, not high enough. This leads to teachers setting tasks that are too simple and require little effort. Consequently, pupils do not attain the outcomes of which they are capable.
- The deployment of teaching assistants is variable and not always beneficial to pupils' learning. A few teaching assistants do too much for pupils, creating an overdependence on their support. In addition, some teaching assistants arrive late to the start of lessons, which does not set a good example to pupils. Where there is a clearly defined role for teaching assistants, they are more effective in supporting pupils' learning.
- Where teaching is strongest, teachers adopt a variety of ways to engage pupils in their learning and successfully hold their attention. This supports progress because pupils more readily get on with tasks and complete their work with minimal distraction. For example, in mathematics, where the teacher had carefully structured the learning,

pupils worked hard to calculate accurately the volume of different prisms.

- Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities are not supported as well as they could be. This is because teachers are sometimes unclear about pupils' specific learning needs, as detailed in individual education plans or EHC plans. This slows these pupils' progress and is preventing their outcomes being good.
- Teachers place an emphasis on developing pupils' speaking and listening skills. Their effective questioning draws out pupils' understanding and provides pupils with plenty of opportunities to express their views. For example, in PSHE, pupils were able to articulate their thoughts about knife crime well because of the teacher's carefully phrased questions.
- Teachers are skilful in making meaningful cross-curricular links between subjects. This supports pupils' learning well. They use their strong subject knowledge to deepen pupils' understanding and develop pupils' technical, subject-specific language. For example, in English, pupils extended their geographical vocabulary and understanding through a cross-curricular English- and humanities-based unit of work.
- In recent months, the teaching of English has improved markedly, especially the teaching of writing. Teachers plan imaginative sequences of work with clear progression which capture pupils' interests. The teaching of art is also a strength.
- Teachers usually monitor pupils' understanding closely during lessons and give immediate feedback to enable them to move on with their learning. This support helps pupils to make increasingly faster rates of progress and is an example of leaders' increasing impact.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Inadequate

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is inadequate.
- Leaders have not taken the necessary steps to ensure that the significant number of pupils who attend on a part-time basis are safeguarded appropriately. In addition, despite the effective programme for PSHE, too many pupils miss essential learning because they are not present in school.
- The majority of pupils do not receive their entitlement to a full-time education. Pupils' attendance is very low and is not improving quickly enough. The attendance of children looked after is of particular concern. Simply put, too many pupils are denied the opportunity to learn because they are not present in lessons and this has a negative impact on the amount of progress that they can make.
- The recently appointed attendance officer has devised a range of strategies to try and improve pupils' attendance. This includes working more closely with parents to help them recognise the importance of their children coming to school regularly. Leaders have been successful in raising the profile of attendance and encouraging pupils to attend school more regularly. However, the benefits of the school's approach to improving attendance cannot be fully realised until the common practice of placing pupils on part-time timetables is addressed.
- Pupils value the positive relationships they have with staff. They say that teachers

listen to them and help them manage their behaviour. Pupils report that there are few instances of bullying and that, if there is any bullying, members of staff deal with it promptly. However, inspectors found that some pupils lacked a clear understanding about what constitutes bullying.

- The provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a strength of the school. Leaders ensure that teachers are responsive to current issues and build these into teaching programmes where appropriate. For example, pupils explored and discussed a news report about a group of children trapped in a cave in Thailand. The teacher helped pupils to develop their understanding of empathy.
- School staff usually work well with external agencies, professionals and alternative providers to ensure that vulnerable pupils receive the right support to help them overcome the barriers that their social, emotional and mental health difficulties present. This enables pupils to build resilience and raise their self-esteem.
- Leaders ensure that good-quality transition arrangements are in place for those pupils returning to mainstream education. Detailed planning, involving the pupil's family and new school, helps to support effective transition.
- Pupils describe their placements with alternative providers positively. They say placements give them a chance to increase their levels of self-confidence and that they learn to socialise better with their peers. Pupils' attendance at alternative provisions is much better than at school.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement. Pupils' responsiveness and positive attitudes to learning diminish when they find the work either too hard or too easy, or they are not engaged. This leads to pupils calling out or swearing frequently, and a few become disruptive or refuse to work. However, staff work hard to try and re-engage pupils in their learning. Often, they are successful, and pupils return to work eventually.
- Pupils' behaviour in lessons varies. In some classes, there is a calm, purposeful working atmosphere where the majority of pupils usually get on with minimal fuss. Equally, there are other times when pupils who exhibit particularly challenging behaviours cause disruption to the learning of others. Staff usually manage these situations well.
- Despite there being a whole-school behaviour policy, and posters positioned in classrooms reminding pupils about behaviour expectations, a few staff do not adhere to the policy closely enough. This sometimes leads to inconsistency in the management of behaviour.
- All pupils have an individual behaviour plan which is reviewed on a regular basis. However, the plans do not set out with enough clarity how an individual pupil's behaviour will be modified or improved. The plans are too general and this limits their impact.
- Even with the extremely limited outdoor space available, most pupils conduct themselves well during breaktimes and lunchtimes. Pupils play table tennis together and enjoy each other's company. Staff supervise pupils effectively, which ensures that unstructured times are relatively calm and orderly.

- Many pupils show good manners and are polite to visitors. They talk about their learning and can explain how the school is trying to support them to manage their behaviour. Teachers provide good opportunities for pupils to take responsibility for their behaviour and make the right choices.

Outcomes for pupils

Inadequate

- Due to the restricted amount of time many pupils spend in school, opportunities to learn and make progress are limited. Consequently, too many pupils, including those who have SEN and/or disabilities, make slow progress and attain poor outcomes over time.
- Pupils are not being adequately prepared for the next stage of their education because they do not attain the necessary qualifications to help them access the most appropriate further education, skills or training. Each year, there are too many pupils who leave school not in education, employment or training. However, encouragingly, this number is reducing.
- The school does not provide pupils with the necessary resources and books to help them develop positive attitudes to reading and to encourage them to read for pleasure. Pupils who have low levels of reading ability do not have their needs adequately met, therefore they leave school unable to read with sufficient competency.
- The most able pupils do not make enough progress and they do not attain the standards of which they are capable. This is because they are rarely set complex tasks to extend their skills and deepen their understanding. However, most pupils achieve well in art because teachers give high levels of consideration to pupils' needs.
- There is clear evidence of improvement in English books, particularly in relation to writing. For example, a group of key stage 4 boys wrote some powerful creative pieces, making effective use of description to bring the writing alive.
- Very few pupils attain a good pass in GCSE English or mathematics. However, a small number of pupils gain some qualifications which serve to build their confidence and provide a starting point for vocational work.
- Some pupils have the opportunity to gain accreditation at their alternative provider placements. This allows pupils to progress into further education linked to the construction, hairdressing and beauty therapy industries. A group of pupils successfully completed their bronze award for the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme.

School details

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| Unique reference number | 132997 |
| Local authority | Staffordshire |
| Inspection number | 10048975 |

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 | 52 |
| Appropriate authority | Local authority |
| Chair | Max Pierzchalla |
| Headteacher | Sonia Lockett |
| Telephone number | 01785 241 784 |
| Website | www.holliesschool.staffs.sch.uk |
| Email address | office@holliesschool.staffs.sch.uk |
| Date of previous inspection | 16 February 2018 |

Information about this school

- The Stafford Pupil Referral Unit at the Stables is more commonly known as 'The Hollies'.
- The school is a pupil referral unit that takes pupils aged 11 to 16. Pupils have either been permanently excluded from mainstream schools or are at risk of permanent exclusion. The aim is that some pupils will reintegrate successfully into a mainstream school.
- The management committee serves a similar function to a governing body.
- The school uses 10 alternative providers, including e-Quality, Reaseheath College, Right Stuff Boxing, Farm Project, Land Base Project, Company of Horseman, Chase Aqua, JP Alternative Education, Chuckle Productions and NACRO Training.
- There is a much larger proportion of boys than girls at the school. The proportion of pupils who are known to be eligible for pupil premium funding is above the national average. The proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is above the

national average, including the proportion who have an EHC plan.

- The headteacher served as acting headteacher from the autumn term 2016 before taking up post as the substantive headteacher in September 2017.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching in key stages 3 and 4 classes across a range of subjects. Most observations were undertaken jointly with members of the school’s leadership team.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, behaviour manager, attendance officer, school business manager and both teaching and support staff. An inspector met with the chair and vice-chair of the management committee, and another representative of the committee who has been providing some consultancy work for the school.
- An inspector met with a representative from Staffordshire’s virtual school for children looked after.
- Inspectors talked individually with pupils to gather their views about the school, and their behaviour and learning.
- An inspector visited one of the school’s alternative providers and held a telephone conversation with another alternative provider.
- A wide range of school documentation was scrutinised, including school policies, the school’s self-evaluation document, the school’s improvement plan and information relating to pupils’ achievement and examination results. The school’s records relating to child protection, behaviour and attendance were also examined.
- There was one response to Ofsted’s online survey, Parent View, and no responses from the pupils’ questionnaire. Inspectors took into account 11 responses received from the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

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|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| Tim Hill, lead inspector | Her Majesty’s Inspector |
| Chris Pollitt | Ofsted Inspector |
| James McNeillie | Her Majesty’s Inspector |

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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