

Pupil referral units

Establishing successful practice in pupil referral units and local authorities

Although there is a wide variety of pupil referral units, they face similar barriers in providing children and young people with a good education. These may include inadequate accommodation, pupils of different ages with diverse needs arriving in an unplanned way, limited numbers of specialist staff to provide a broad curriculum and difficulties reintegrating pupils into mainstream schools. The success of pupil referral units depends on their responses to these challenges and the support they receive from their local authority.

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Executive summary

Pupil referral units (PRUs) are short stay centres for pupils who are educated other than at maintained or special schools, and they vary considerably in size and function. They admit pupils with behavioural difficulties and others who can be identified as vulnerable because of their health or social and emotional difficulties. Some PRUs educate and support school-aged mothers.

Although there is a wide variety of PRUs, they face similar barriers in providing children and young people with a good education. These may include inadequate accommodation, pupils of different ages with diverse needs arriving in an unplanned way, limited numbers of specialist staff to provide a broad curriculum and difficulties reintegrating pupils into mainstream schools. The success of PRUs depends on their responses to these challenges and the support they receive from their local authority (LA). In 2005/06 over half the PRUs inspected nationally were good or outstanding, but one in eight was inadequate.¹

Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools (HMI) and Additional Inspectors visited 28 PRUs in 22 LAs between October 2006 and March 2007. The PRUs were selected from those whose overall effectiveness had been judged by Ofsted to be good or outstanding in the previous two years. The majority of them provided primarily for pupils with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. Others made provision for those with medical needs and one was solely for young mothers. Several catered on the same site for pupils with different needs.

During this survey, Ofsted inspected good and outstanding PRUs at Key Stages 3 and 4, as well as holding discussions with the LAs to identify factors which contributed to success. These PRUs had much in common. Shared purpose and direction were key features. Staff conveyed to pupils that they were offering a 'second chance' or a 'fresh start'; they had high expectations, set challenging tasks for them and anticipated what support they would need. It was essential to have a well designed curriculum that allowed pupils to improve basic skills where necessary and re-engaged them in learning through interesting experiences. For older pupils, who often stayed for over a year, accreditation and work-related learning were important for motivation. All the PRUs made sure personal and social development was emphasised: it was integrated into all lessons and activities, as well as being taught well at discrete times. The PRUs generally monitored personal development well but academic progress less so.

To provide an appropriate and well balanced curriculum almost all the PRUs inspected had to overcome limitations in their accommodation. This was achieved by

¹ *The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools 2005/06* (ISBN 0102943451), The Stationery Office, 2006; available from www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/annualreport0506.

working with local schools and using community facilities well. Partnerships with schools and other agencies were used effectively to enhance the curriculum and personal development.

LAs worked closely with the PRUs. They helped them to develop links with partners, supported leaders and contributed to staff development. All the authorities visited could describe how the PRU contributed to a continuum of provision for pupils with social, emotional, behavioural and medical difficulties. However, some LAs had a gap between intention and practice, so children and young people often stayed in a PRU for an indefinite period. Not knowing the length of the placement made longer term planning difficult and opportunities to reintegrate pupils into mainstream schooling were limited. This was partly because subsequent provision was not identified before pupils were admitted to the PRU.

Although all the LAs had clear admission policies and protocols that specified the details schools should provide, in practice PRUs generally received little information, particularly about pupils' academic achievement. LAs' monitoring and evaluation of provision in PRUs varied in quality and too often lacked the necessary focus on pupils' progress. Almost all PRUs had well established management committees, although their role and effectiveness varied.

Key findings

- The successful PRUs visited had a clear sense of purpose. They focused strongly on pupils' academic and personal development and on increasing their confidence to prepare them for mainstream school or for the next stage of their life.
- These PRUs provided an interesting, relevant and appropriately accredited curriculum. Partnerships with a wide range of agencies supported pupils and enriched their experiences, particularly for the many PRUs which had limited specialist facilities of their own.
- Eight of the PRUs visited had good systems for assessing and tracking pupils' progress. However, almost all of them received too little information from pupils' previous schools, even though 14 LAs had clear policies about what should be provided. This hampered the PRUs in establishing pupils' attainment levels on admission.
- Well managed provision for pupils with behavioural, emotional, social and medical difficulties included appropriate plans for the next steps for each pupil, clearly defined timescales and systems to put planning into action. All these enabled the timely and systematic reintegration of pupils into mainstream schooling.
- Productive partnerships between a PRU and its LA were characterised by clearly defined roles and responsibilities for the LA, the teacher in charge and the PRU's management committee, as well as good quality support from the LA for the leaders of the PRU. The leaders were involved in decision making and this developed effective joint working.

- Commonly, pupils with statements of special educational need had been admitted to PRUs without appropriate decisions being taken about long term placement. In four PRUs some statements of educational special need named it as the school to provide the support; this does not fully comply with the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) guidance that where a pupil's special needs are long term the pupil should be given a special school rather than a PRU placement.² Most monitoring by LAs of the progress of these pupils was minimal and consisted only of the LA's attendance at the annual review meeting if indeed one took place during the pupil's time at the PRU.
- LAs' support for the managers of PRUs was at least satisfactory and sometimes very good. However, their monitoring was often insufficient to evaluate the PRUs rigorously and seldom focused on the pupils' progress and achievement. The lack of detailed evaluative analysis of data or observations of teaching and learning constrained LAs from challenging PRUs and focusing support on raising standards.
- Almost all PRUs had well established management committees, although their role and effectiveness varied. The most effective had a good understanding of the PRU's strengths and the areas needing development and provided appropriate challenge and support.

Recommendations

LAs should:

- actively encourage mainstream schools to provide data about attainment, attendance and the behavioural, emotional and social needs of pupils being admitted to a PRU
- monitor and evaluate rigorously a PRU's effectiveness
- follow DCSF guidance on placing and monitoring pupils with a statement of special educational need in a PRU
- ensure that PRU accommodation is suitable and that improvements are made urgently where necessary
- work with PRUs to develop clear and rigorous systems for tracking each pupil's academic, social, emotional and behavioural progress
- ensure that all pupils receive the required amount of provision
- help management committees to provide PRUs with appropriate challenge and support.

² The guidance also says what should be done if such pupils are admitted to PRUs. *Guidance for local authorities and schools: pupil referral units and alternative provision* (LEA/0024-2005), DfES, 2005; available from: <http://publications.teachernet.gov.uk>. On 28 June 2007 the Department for Education and Skills became the Department for Children, Schools and Families and the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills.

Pupil referral units should:

- use information about pupils' prior attainment effectively to ensure a smooth transition and to match work to pupils' needs
- ensure that their expectations of the pupils are suitably high
- prioritise the improvement of literacy and numeracy skills where appropriate
- ensure that systems to track and evaluate pupils' academic and social, emotional and behavioural progress are clear and rigorous
- use local facilities well to provide a good curriculum where on-site accommodation is limited.

The pupil referral units

'We don't let the youngsters down by accepting second best.'
(a leader of a PRU)

Direction and purpose

1. All leaders of PRUs were clear about their unit's core purpose. The most effective practice was characterised by firm agreement between the PRU leader and the LA about the PRU's purpose. Staff frequently saw an educational 'fresh start' or 'second chance' as a core part of their purpose. There was a strong focus on building pupils' academic, social, emotional and behavioural skills, self-belief and confidence to prepare them to return to mainstream schooling or the next stage of their life.
2. One PRU leader described a safe, happy and emotionally healthy environment as 'the foundation stone for learning'. The PRU believed strongly in holistic improvement and a 'journey of the individual'. The staff worked very effectively to build positive relationships and believed strongly in pupils' potential. Caring but firm approaches enabled pupils to begin to believe they could succeed personally and educationally. Staff continually challenged pupils in their learning, with an emphasis on achieving their personal best. The PRU promoted equal opportunities strongly. It aimed for full-time provision for all: in practice, some pupils achieved this faster than others, either because they were motivated or because their emotional or behavioural needs were less of a barrier. For those who found it harder the PRU emphasised that 'the door is always open'. Strategies for individuals helped to accelerate their progress.
3. Without exception, PRU leaders saw as vital an appropriate curriculum that emphasised the necessary basic skills to help pupils overcome barriers to learning. To achieve this they established a supportive yet challenging environment. They strongly encouraged staff to work as a team in enabling children and young people to face up to their problems in learning and their behavioural, emotional and social difficulties.

Purpose and direction were characterised by an emphasis on:

- high expectations
- re-engaging pupils in learning
- effective teaching
- all staff developing positive relationships with all pupils
- preparing pupils socially and academically for reintegration and the world of work
- improving pupils' emotional health and well-being.

These were understood by the PRU leaders, staff and the LA.

The curriculum

4. All the PRUs visited made good arrangements to teach an interesting and appropriate curriculum that, in Key Stage 4 in particular, was accredited. Combined with good teaching and good or outstanding attention to pupils' personal development, this enabled them to achieve well.
5. All the PRUs where some of the pupils had learning difficulties or had fallen behind in their studies emphasised the development of literacy and numeracy appropriately. The best of the PRUs visited provided ample opportunity for pupils to read; for example, one paired each pupil with an adult to read together in four tutorials a week. In one PRU visited, pupils with behavioural difficulties were keen to emphasise how their basic skills had improved and why this was important to them. A legacy of unmet needs, particularly in literacy, had led to frustration and a feeling of failure and exacerbated their poor behaviour. As their reading improved they began to see how they could be successful in their other lessons.
6. Provision in the PRUs for information and communication technology (ICT) was generally good and, in a few cases, excellent, but it was occasionally hindered by a lack of facilities. Almost all PRUs taught science. Four did not because of a lack of facilities or specialist staff, although this was always seen as a temporary difficulty. Other PRUs had overcome similar difficulties by working with local mainstream schools and sometimes negotiating to share staff.
7. Staffing was well thought out. Employing part-time staff allowed even small PRUs to provide an interesting and broad curriculum, mainly taught by subject specialists. Some employed visiting teachers for art and design, music, and physical education (PE). Others regularly used specialists, such as artists in residence, to enrich a more basic curriculum. At one PRU, the majority of the teaching assistants and learning mentors were qualified sports coaches and the site manager had a background in youth work: all these contributed to the curriculum.
8. For 16 of the PRUs visited, inadequate accommodation limited the curriculum which could be taught on site; examples included no space either indoors or outdoors to teach PE, no specialist teaching rooms for science, ICT, design and

technology, art or music, no playground for recreation and no dining room. At one PRU, pupils attended part-time because of a lack of teaching space.

9. Over half the PRUs visited had insufficient space to teach PE. However, eight made particularly effective arrangements with other providers to compensate and to give pupils a good quality experience. At one PRU, pupils took athletics, basketball, hockey and football lessons during the year and attended weekly swimming lessons where they could gain awards. Another offered badminton, squash, tennis, swimming, table tennis, basketball and trampolining. An annual 20-day outdoor education course included archery, abseiling, coracle building and wood turning. These opportunities increased pupils' confidence and their physical competence, as well as helping them to face unfamiliar situations, work as a team and become more tenacious. The lack of space for socialising, however, was a problem for many PRUs, although good efforts were made to compensate; for example, by providing board and computer games at lunchtime. Nevertheless, opportunities were limited for pupils to socialise in an unstructured way and unwind.
10. All the PRUs visited placed a strong emphasis on personal, social and health education (PSHE) and on personal development throughout the curriculum. Typically, they focused on preparing pupils for reintegration into school or college; the development of good social skills, resilience and self-control was continuous. In the best examples the curriculum enabled pupils to continue with the GCSE courses which they had started at school. This was particularly strong in some of the PRUs which cater for pupils with medical needs and those who are pregnant.
11. The best curricula emphasised effective work-related learning. One PRU used the skills of non-teaching staff particularly well to develop a vocational curriculum. Partnerships with outside agencies were generally used well to develop work-related learning. One PRU where accommodation was particularly limiting had developed an innovative range of courses, which included a land-based operations course on a local smallholding, a farm project and courses at the local college. As a result, pupils were being well prepared for leaving school.
12. The most effective PRUs offered pupils a different curriculum according to their needs. One gave pupils a range of choices, including academic subjects, vocational courses such as motor vehicle maintenance and construction, a range of college courses, and leisure and sporting activities. This flexibility was particularly important for PRUs where pupils tended to remain for the whole of Key Stage 4. Occasional use was made of online learning to extend or enhance the curriculum, but this was not widespread.
13. Accreditation varied. One small PRU offered four full GCSE courses, eight entry level courses, and seven other accredited courses. Another enabled pupils to take six GCSE courses combined with other accreditation. In a third PRU, GCSE

courses were relatively new and most pupils took only one. However, each PRU with Key Stage 4 pupils had developed and added to the accreditation it offered during the past two years and there was a growing emphasis on the importance of accrediting learning.

A good curriculum:

- emphasised the basic skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT
- used creative approaches to motivate pupils to learn
- emphasised personal development in all subject areas
- included a comprehensive PSHE programme
- included a wide variety of subjects
- supported reintegration through good links to the National Curriculum
- used part-time staff effectively to provide specialist teaching
- was enriched by links with partners and external providers
- used local facilities effectively and overcame limitations of the accommodation well.

Assessing and tracking progress

14. Eight of the PRUs visited had good systems for assessing, recording and tracking pupils' academic progress which had many features in common.
15. Almost all the PRUs were hampered in establishing pupils' attainment levels when they entered because of a lack of information from their previous schools, even though 14 of the authorities visited had clear policies about what the schools should provide. The PRUs generally used teachers' assessments to decide on starting points, but also talked to pupils about their previous work. A few used standardised reading and mathematics tests to help establish a baseline. Occasionally, pupils' attainment levels were not established accurately enough with the result that work was not matched well enough to pupils' needs. This meant that, later, the PRU was unable to determine whether pupils had made adequate progress.
16. Two multi-site PRUs used common tracking system across all the sites which allowed pupils' performance to be compared. If disparate systems were used, LAs were not able to compare easily the progress made by pupils in different PRUs.
17. In six of the PRUs, evaluating and tracking academic progress were lacking in rigour. Unclear starting points, a lack of challenging targets and infrequent assessment were common. Although individual teachers assessed pupils' progress, the frequency and quality of this varied too much. The lack of a central recording system meant that senior leaders were unable to ask challenging questions about pupils' progress, either across the curriculum or in individual subjects. In a few of the settings, pupils' progress was measured only in terms of the targets in their individual education plans.

18. All the PRUs visited knew pupils' social and behavioural needs well and regularly monitored their progress. Those with pupils who had been excluded set targets for their behaviour and monitored them through methods such as log books, daily feedback sheets, report cards and wall charts. These were used effectively to inform the regular discussions between the pupil and an identified member of staff. Rewards and certificates were used well to motivate pupils. Occasionally, targets were too broad or imprecise to assess progress adequately.
19. Bringing together academic, behavioural, social and emotional and all other assessment information was an effective way of informing planning. One PRU used such information to determine progress through the PRU, whether additional support was needed, both internal and external, and readiness for reintegration. Another PRU used all the information it gathered to produce weekly progress summaries for each pupil. Staff discussed these and used them for planning. After 10 weeks of placement a full report was produced – which included the pupil's and parents' views and National Curriculum levels – and a longer term plan for the pupil was decided upon.
20. In all but two of the PRUs the progress of Key Stage 4 pupils in work-related learning was monitored and evaluated well through reports from employers, liaison with the Connexions service, profiles from work experience, visits from PRU staff, and pupils' self-assessment.

Characteristics of good assessment, recording and tracking of pupils' academic progress:

- pupils' attainment levels were established soon after admission
- challenging targets for improvement were set with pupils for each subject, and for basic skills such as reading where necessary, using data on pupils' prior attainment where available
- pupils' progress towards meeting their targets was assessed regularly and recorded clearly
- information from assessment was used well to plan appropriate lessons
- when targets were reached, further challenging ones were set
- underachievement was identified quickly and support or intervention arranged
- pupils knew how much progress they were making and marking showed them how to improve
- parents were engaged and kept well informed
- pupils' progress was tracked, by subjects and by groups as well as for individuals, so that comparisons could be made and questions asked about provision
- data from assessment and tracking were used to inform schools about pupils' attainment and achievement before reintegration.

Working with partners

21. All the PRUs visited had good partnerships with schools and colleges that supported their curriculum and staff development. The chair of the management committee of one PRU was the headteacher of a local school close to the site; he offered access to his school's specialist facilities which assisted in broadening the PRU's curriculum. LAs with several PRUs were often able to share expertise effectively. Five PRUs in one LA systematically shared good practice and innovation which had improved the curriculum on all the sites. The best partnerships were mutually beneficial: the staff of the PRU shared their expertise with the mainstream schools to counter exclusions or to help with strategies to support vulnerable pupils.
22. The PRUs visited generally found that, despite these partnerships, schools did not readily offer places to PRU pupils. Occasionally, individual partnerships eased reintegration but, generally, reintegration was effective and efficient only where the LA had good strategic arrangements and pursued these determinedly.
23. In one PRU for pregnant young women and young mothers good links were maintained with the pupils' schools throughout their time at the PRU. Each school identified a liaison teacher who kept in touch with the pupil throughout their time at the PRU. This enabled the pupil to reintegrate smoothly as soon as they were ready to do so after giving birth.
24. The strongest links were with providers of vocational and practical training. These enabled work-based learning to take place and extended the curriculum and accreditation. PRUs and LAs had secured a wide range of such provision, from college places to work providers and intensively supported training environments. These were particularly important for Key Stage 4 pupils who spent all or most of the key stage at the PRU.
25. All the PRUs visited engaged a wide range of agencies to help pupils to be healthy and safe. Partnerships with the Connexions service were particularly strong. Partners such as the school nurse, local emergency services, drugs counsellors and charities were used effectively to support PSHE and the teaching of citizenship. In one LA, a multi-agency team approach helped to ensure that the support was well coordinated. PRUs for young mothers had good involvement from health visitors and midwives.
26. Around two thirds of the PRUs visited thought that the support they received from the child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) was at least satisfactory, but it was sometimes difficult to gain swift access to it. About a third of the PRUs found it difficult to gain sufficient support from CAMHS. Some of these PRUs wished for closer contact with CAMHS staff to enable them to provide better support for pupils with mental health needs. One PRU had no

direct links with CAMHS and did not refer its pupils to the service, although some were attending through other referral routes.

Effective work with partners:

- supported the curriculum
- helped to meet pupils' individual social, emotional and behavioural needs
- was facilitated by the LA where necessary
- helped to smooth reintegration to school
- enabled vocational subjects to be provided for long stay Key Stage 4 pupils
- shared the expertise in the PRU with mainstream schools.

Local authorities

Admissions

27. Almost all the LAs visited had clear admission policies, which set out the information schools should provide to PRUs. However, the PRUs generally received sparse information about pupils' academic progress indicating a marked gap between policy and practice.
28. LAs varied substantially as to whether the teachers in charge of the PRUs were members of an LA's placement panel. In most cases, however, they were positive about the extent of their involvement and influence on the process of placing pupils.
29. Fourteen of the LAs expected schools to provide information about pupils' attainment and progress as well as their pastoral and behavioural needs. The remainder required insufficient information from schools, or their expectations were simply too vague. One LA simply expected schools to provide 'as much information as possible'.
30. Even where the LA expected academic information to be provided, schools' information tended to focus on behaviour rather than academic attainment and attendance. One PRU visited referred to receiving a plethora of information about 'problems and misdemeanours' but little else. This dearth of academic information inhibited the PRUs in finding the right starting point for pupils' learning. PRUs that did receive good quality, timely information were quickly able to plan an appropriate programme. This limited the disruption to a pupil's education and helped to ensure a smooth and positive start.
31. Sixteen of the LAs thought it was important to establish positive relationships with parents at an early stage and had effective and appropriate procedures for this. One LA asked parents to sign an agreement to support their child in improving attendance and behaviour. Staff from the PRU regularly visited homes, developed good relationships and offered support. The PRU kept

parents informed about their child's progress, enabling them to feel involved as well as supported. As a result, the parents felt more confident in helping with school work, supporting their child to meet targets for behaviour, and in knowing what was going on.

Good admission policies:

- were strategic
- were followed by all
- were monitored
- made it clear what processes schools needed to follow before pupils were admitted
- specified what information schools should provide to PRUs and insisted on academic information.

Good admission arrangements:

- involved the head of the PRU fully
- involved parents early
- ensured the PRU had full information about a pupil's academic, social, emotional, behavioural and medical needs before admission
- included induction for the pupil, such as baseline assessment; discussion with the pupil about strengths, weaknesses, course work undertaken; an assessed piece of work; testing if appropriate
- were managed well by the LA and avoided several challenging pupils being admitted simultaneously.

A continuum of provision?

32. All the LAs visited were able to describe a continuum of provision for pupils with behavioural, emotional, social and medical difficulties. However, this seldom operated effectively in practice.
33. Four of the LAs used PRUs strategically. They had a clear rationale for placing a pupil in a PRU, and good protocols and procedures which they applied consistently. In six other LAs, the principles were good but did not operate well in practice.
34. Whether the PRU catered for a group of pupils with very specific needs, such as medical needs, behavioural difficulties, or support during pregnancy, or whether this was mixed, varied. A specific remit made the management and organisation of the PRU more straightforward and simplified curriculum planning. However, particularly in some rural areas, some PRUs visited were catering very effectively for pupils with widely varying needs within the same centre. Strong leadership which had created a positive ethos was particularly essential in these settings in ensuring a harmonious community was created and that pupils were suitably challenged and supported.

35. Procedures for reintegration were generally unclear and over a third of the LAs visited did not have specific targets for reintegration or provide clear data about reintegration. This limited their ability to set targets, ask challenging questions of the PRU and mainstream schools and identify any problems with reintegration.
36. Placements seldom had end dates. LAs encouraged PRUs to reintegrate younger pupils into mainstream schools. However, where the onus was on the PRU to find and secure a school place this was often very difficult to achieve. Commonly, the LA and the PRU saw Key Stage 4 pupils, particularly those in Year 11, as unlikely to return to a mainstream or special school; as a result, the PRU placement became permanent. Learning for these pupils, involving college and work placements, was often well thought out, allowing pupils to take a range of qualifications.
37. In one multi-site PRU reintegration was carefully planned and evaluated by the PRU leader and the LA. Figures showed that, in 2005/06, reintegration has been successful for all the Key Stage 1 pupils, for 98% of those at Key Stage 2 and for 75% at Key Stage 3. No pupil had stayed at the PRU for longer than 18 months, except for some Key Stage 4 pupils who stayed until the end of Year 11. One PRU had a clear policy of keeping excluded pupils for two terms to assess them and to tackle barriers to learning before reintegrating them. One LA identified the school to which the pupil was to return before the pupil was admitted to the PRU. This gave the pupils something to aspire to and ensured they did not see the PRU as a long term placement.
38. How well reintegration was managed varied, but it was generally too ad hoc. In one LA visited an admissions panel of secondary headteachers in one part of the LA managed the reintegration of Key Stage 3 pupils, but this did not operate across the LA as a whole. Other strategies included reintegration officers or teams to negotiate with local schools to find places for excluded pupils. However, because reintegration officers were not always a planned part of an LA's strategy, too often PRUs had to create this role from within their basic staffing allocation or else it did not exist.
39. If pupils were not reintegrated before the end of Key Stage 3, they tended to spend the rest of their education within a PRU. As a result, they did not benefit from mainstream provision for at least two of their final years of schooling.
40. The result of inadequate reintegration procedures is that too many PRUs are full and unable to take new pupils. Consequently, some pupils who are permanently excluded cannot be placed or are offered only part-time provision.
41. One of the LAs visited had a particularly well organised system for reintegration. A good management structure enabled all services for children educated other than at school to be led by a senior officer with clear protocols, including for pupils whose circumstances made it harder to place them. This

helped the LA to secure the cooperation of schools in operating a system of 'managed transfer' to support reintegration. The LA was not afraid to exercise its duties and powers of direction to ensure pupils gained school places.

42. Almost all the PRUs in the survey had pupils with statements of special educational need. In the LAs with no designated special school for pupils with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, almost all the pupils in the PRUs had a statement. In others, all the pupils left the special school at the end of Year 9 and were admitted to the PRU; some of these pupils with statements received all their education at the local college. Commonly, pupils with statements were admitted to PRUs without decisions being made about the length of their stay or their next placement, and stayed indefinitely. In four of the PRUs, some pupils' statement of special educational need named the PRU as the pupil's school. This does not fully comply with DCSF guidance for schools and LAs that states that if a pupil's long term needs cannot be met in a mainstream school, a special school rather than a PRU should be named on a statement of special educational need.³
43. PRUs were sometimes unable to meet the requirements of the pupils' statements of special educational need; for example, the full National Curriculum was seldom taught. In some cases pupils with a statement were not receiving a full time education. Many stayed on the roll of a PRU for an inappropriately long time, sometimes years. At least two of the LAs visited had policies which stated clearly that pupils with a statement should not be placed in a PRU but, nevertheless, they had such pupils on the PRUs' rolls. Most monitoring by LAs of the progress made by pupils with statements was minimal and consisted only of the LA's attendance at the annual review meeting.

An effective continuum of provision involved:

- a clear rationale for placing a pupil in a PRU
- good protocols and procedures which were followed rigorously
- clear exit strategies, identified for each pupil at admission
- time limited placements
- well conceived local arrangements with headteachers of mainstream provision for the strategic reintegration of excluded pupils
- support teams or staff for reintegrating pupils and helping to find them mainstream places and to succeed once they were reintegrated
- appropriate support for pupils with statements of special educational need and a swift placement in a mainstream or special school, especially in Key Stages 1, 2 and 3.

³ See paragraph 4.28 in *Guidance for local authorities and schools: pupil referral units and alternative provision* (LEA/0024-2005), DfES, 2005; available from <http://publications.teachernet.gov.uk>.

Monitoring and evaluation

44. LAs' support for the managers of PRUs was at least satisfactory and sometimes very good in those visited. They created opportunities for the managers to be included in making decisions about policies for the PRUs and helped them in liaising with headteachers and others in the LA. They provided training for managers and PRU staff, which managers found helpful. Learning and development work on managing particularly challenging pupils was especially appreciated.
45. However, monitoring by the LAs was often insufficiently rigorous to allow them to evaluate the success of the PRUs effectively. Too often, LAs asked for general information that seldom focused on the pupils' progress and achievement. A further weakness was that little monitoring was carried out on-site. The lack of detailed evaluative analysis of data or observations of teaching and learning affected LAs' ability to challenge the PRUs and to provide focused support to raise standards.
46. All teachers in charge and management committees saw that they had a role in monitoring and evaluation. However, the role often lacked clarity. Who should observe teaching and learning, and the frequency and purpose of this observation, were often unclear.
47. Almost all PRUs had well established management committees, although their role and effectiveness varied. Most had a wide representation of officers, headteachers, teachers and others associated with education. Under-representation of staff from mainstream schools often limited the committee's effectiveness in developing links with such schools.
48. The management committee of one multi-site PRU had a clear remit to evaluate the effectiveness of the service. The committee comprised a wide range of people and held half-termly meetings at different centres. Although the LA managed the budget, committee members were responsible for appointments. The chair attended termly LA reviews of the PRU service, as well as staff training where possible. Written reports and the scrutiny of data on performance helped to ensure effective accountability. Through this combined approach the management committee had developed a good knowledge and understanding of the aims of the service and the pupils' learning needs and could provide both support and challenge.
49. The best monitoring and evaluation by the LAs visited involved good tracking systems. Data were supplemented by a range of monitoring activities, such as scrutinies of pupils' work and lesson observations. The information was used systematically and regularly to evaluate the progress which individuals and groups were making. PRU managers were also able to judge how successful their interventions had been. To enable them to develop their monitoring and evaluation skills, most LAs involved the managers in evaluation while

maintaining overall control. Similarly, the management committees had a clear role in the process. PRU managers produced regular reports for the management committee and the LA, identifying attainment and progress, attendance and reintegration. These reports helped committee members to ask questions and to play a fuller part in acting as a critical friend.

Where monitoring and evaluation were strong:

- roles and responsibilities were clearly defined
- the PRU had rigorous systems for evaluating pupils' progress
- the management committee was clear about its evaluative role
- the LA and the management committee regularly asked for information about pupils' progress which was used to assess the PRU's success
- targets for reintegration were set and monitored
- LAs trained PRU leaders to monitor effectively
- LAs regularly visited the PRU to monitor as well as support
- management committee members were well informed, enabling them to ask challenging questions.

Notes

Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools (HMI) and Additional Inspectors visited 28 PRUs in 22 LAs whose overall effectiveness had been judged by Ofsted to be good or outstanding in the previous two years. The sample included PRUs for pupils in Key Stages 3 and 4 across the country in both city and rural locations. The majority of them provided for pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Others made provision for those with medical needs and one was for young mothers. Several catered for pupils on the same site with a combination of these needs. PRUs which worked at multiple sites received visits from inspectors to only parts of the provision.

Inspections involved observation of lessons, discussions with the headteacher or teacher in charge, with staff and with pupils, and analysis of documentation. Discussions were also held with one or more senior officers from the LA.

Further information

Publications

Guidance for local authorities and schools: pupil referral units and alternative provision (LEA/0024-2005), DfES, 2005; available from <http://publications.teachernet.gov.uk>

Developing social, emotional and behavioural skills in secondary schools: a five term longitudinal evaluation of the Secondary National Strategy pilot (ref. no 070048), Ofsted, 2007; available from www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/070048

Websites

The Department for Children, Schools and Families exclusions and alternative provision⁴

www.dcsf.gov.uk/exclusions/alternative_provision_policies/pupil_referral_units.cfm

Every Child Matters and PRUs

www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/ete/agencies/pru/

Teenage pregnancy

www.parentscentre.gov.uk/educationandlearning/schoollife/ifthingsgowrong/teenage_pregnancy/

The legal position

www.dcsf.gov.uk/publications/guidanceonthelaw/11-99/referral.htm

Frequently asked questions

www.dcsf.gov.uk/exclusions/faq/index.cfm

⁴ The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) was created on 28 June 2007: www.dcsf.gov.uk/aboutus/.

Annex 1

Management committees

Between December 2006 and March 2007 the DfES carried out a consultation on the Government's plans to introduce regulations making it a statutory duty for LAs to establish management committees for their PRUs. In addition the DfES ran a short, targeted consultation on the functions of management committees in May 2007. The latest information about the outcomes of this consultation is available from www.dcsf.gov.uk/consultations/conResults.cfm?consultationId=1451.

Annex 2

Pupil referral units visited for this survey

The Amber Centre, Cambridgeshire
Aqueduct (Medical), Telford and Wrekin
Breadsall Support Centre, Derbyshire
Brent Pupil Referral Unit, Brent
Burley Park Centre, Leeds
Complementary Education, Northampton
Dacorum Education Support Centre, Hertfordshire
Haybrook College, Slough
Holyoakes Field Pupil Referral Unit, Worcestershire
Integrated Support Centre, Harlow
Key Stage Four Pupil Referral Unit, North Somerset
King Street Pupil Referral Unit, Telford and Wrekin
Lea Valley Education Support Centre, Hertfordshire
Middle Years Pupil Referral Unit, North Somerset
New Leaf Centre, Walsall
Oakfield Pupil Referral Unit, Worcestershire
Peterborough Pupil Referral Unit, Peterborough
Quayside Education Centre, Hampshire
Secondary Pupil Referral Unit, Bradford
St David's Pupil Referral Unit, Herefordshire
Summit Centre, Wigan
The Compass, Dorset
The Priory Pupil Referral Unit, Herefordshire
The Ruiz Centre, Walsall
Tile Hill PRU, Coventry
Triple Crown Centre, Solihull
Tuition, Medical and Behaviour Support Service, Shropshire
Young People's Education Centre, North Lincolnshire

Local authorities visited for this survey

Bradford
Brent
Cambridgeshire
Coventry
Derbyshire
Dorset
Essex
Hampshire
Herefordshire
Hertfordshire
Leeds
Northamptonshire
North Lincolnshire
North Somerset
Peterborough
Shropshire
Slough
Solihull
Telford and Wrekin
Walsall
Wigan
Worcestershire