

Appendix One

Report on PRU Provision – Nottinghamshire July 2012

What is the current state of play at the PRU?

What are the positive outcomes for the learners?

What are the strengths and to some degree what are the weaknesses in order to make a judgement about quality of the service we have commissioned and the value for money?

What are the views of the staff about direction of travel and potential future arrangements?

What are the views of some parents and pupils?

Current situation

Ethos

The morale of staff has been affected by a range of events and issues. There is uncertainty about their future in light of four major re-organisations since 2005. This is exacerbated by the lack of information regarding the circumstances surrounding the absence of the substantive headteacher. These events, in conjunction with factors outlined below, have generated a lack of trust in the Local Authority.

Although The Learning Centre was intended to be a short stay provision, 54 percent of pupils have been in the Centre for 12 weeks to a year, and 24 percent have been on roll for more than a year. The reintegration of pupils back into mainstream or other appropriate provision is proportionately less than the number of exclusions. The backlog is exacerbated by the attitudes of schools, and the lengthy processes of the Day 55 Panel. Attitudes to excluded pupils in some schools make them reluctant to take previously permanently excluded pupils. In some schools there is an unrealistic expectation of vulnerable pupils with low self-esteem. The process of Day 55 Panel is laborious and the delay fosters and exacerbates pupils' de-motivation. Furthermore, the curriculum is inappropriate and inadequate for pupils who have had little success in mainstream settings, particularly the long-stay pupils.

The higher number of pupils referred at Key Stages 3 and 4 indicates insufficient preventative work in some mainstream schools earlier in pupils' school careers. The Learning Centre estimates that 96 percent of pupils are at School Action Plus and have not received adequate and early support. The differences in the ethos of primary and secondary schools, in terms of their ability to nurture those who find school difficult, possibly accounts for the much higher rate of exclusions at secondary level. Of the 39 exclusions in the Spring term, 34 were from secondary schools. (In the Autumn term there were 53 exclusions) This number has undoubtedly been inflated recently by the opening of academies whose priority has been to improve behaviour. Nevertheless, there is a lack of provision for some pupils who have the most extreme challenging behaviour. In some centres there is a sense of hopelessness regarding those pupils.

Outcomes

Attendance

As observed by the recent Ofsted inspection, the attendance rate is low. Although there has been an increase over the year, it has plateaued at around 75 percent. Systems for chasing up on absences have been tightened up. There is also a high staff absence rate

and this is acknowledged in the centre's Improvement Priorities. The interaction between staff and pupil absence is likely to be significant given the lack of confidence and purpose of pupils and the inappropriateness of the curriculum for disaffected pupils.

Achievement

The Learning Centre's own evaluation shows that fewer pupils are making at least satisfactory progress since Ofsted. This is thought to be due to more accurate assessments.

Pupils making at least satisfactory progress (1 point per term) in Spring term (Taken from evaluation of Spring term, written in summer term 2012)

Key Stage 2

English	38.5%	(71.4%)	Number in brackets refers to previous term
Math	69.3%	(85.7%)	

Key Stage 3

English	43.8%	(74.3%)
Maths	39.6%	(88.6%)
Science	48%	(74.3%)

Key Stage 4

English	45%	(56%)
Maths	45.9%	(91.2)
Science	40.5%	?

Systems are being established to monitor progress more efficiently. Where the work is well matched to individual needs, pupils' progress should accelerate during their time out of mainstream school. Improving attendance and pupils' progress are, therefore, major priorities, especially in light of the high cost of provision.

Key Stage 4 pupils have off-site provision to extend their experience and access to a range of qualifications. Extending provision for this age group was recommended by Ofsted. However, not only is there significant variation in the quality of the provision, but there is an uneven distribution of availability across the county with fewer opportunities in the north. Overall there are 25 percent NEET pupils this year, with the highest number being in Oakdale (35.7%).

Behaviour

At the time of the visits, there were very few pupils in each centre, typically 10-15. The pupils say they feel safe in the centre and enjoy less *nagging*. They believe that staff are there to help and they appreciate being treated courteously. In each centre say there are some staff that are always fair. They felt that there was less stress for them in the learning centres compared with school. While none could readily bring their targets to mind, they totally understood that point system because they received rewards. However, some of the documentation from the Learning Centre, identifies concerns about the amount of personal abuse aimed at staff, and some inconsistent use of rewards, sanctions and a code of conduct by the staff.

A student survey, conducted in January this year, collated the responses from 53 pupils across the centres. Half of the pupils, however, were from Oakdale, so it is not a fair sample across all centres and extrapolation must be tentative. Most indicated that they did

not enjoy school, but more than half felt safe while in the centres. About half of the responses indicated that they learn a lot in school, but most said that the behaviour was not good. Those interviewed said behaviour was average. About half felt that adults cared about them, but more than half felt that teachers were not interested in their views. More than half of the pupils said that adults explained how to improve their work and helped to prepare them for the future.

The high absence rate undoubtedly affects any judgements on pupils' behaviour and safety, since there is no evidence of the experiences of those who are not in the centres.

Quality of the service based on evidence from visits including views of mainstream schools, parents and pupils

Teaching

Although Ofsted commented in the report that teaching was good, it is not clear how this could be the case with low attendance and satisfactory achievement. The Learning Centre has, this term, carried out its own quality assurance and made a decision not to announce when they will be carrying out observations. As a result, the teaching is now judged to be satisfactory.

The need to link planning and assessment more closely is recognised by The Learning Centre in its improvement priorities. There is often limited information from schools regarding pupils' educational, social, behavioural and emotional development on entry. For example, where pupils have been on partial exclusion, although they have been counted as attending, albeit elsewhere, this does not address the gaps that pupils have in their understanding. This limits the speed with which pupils' needs can be assessed and addressed. Work in pupils' books indicates some over-estimation of levels. Although there is moderation across centres, it may be prudent to engage mainstream schools in the moderation process, ideally with the excluding schools. The small amount of planning seen did not appear to specifically address individual needs. Staff say that they know their pupils well, but there is scope for greater precision in the teaching

In those lessons visited during the survey, there was insufficient provision for the widely differing needs and abilities of those represented in the class. The Learning Centre acknowledges that differentiation is an area for development. Available details for each pupil are being put onto a computerised spreadsheet, but this was incomplete at the time of the visits. The key information for staff to plan learning relates to reading, writing, speaking, listening and numeracy levels and abilities, and realistic predictions. Additionally, they need information regarding barriers to learning, strategies for encouraging positive behaviours and details of social and emotional development. Staff might find it helpful to explore a wider range of ways into the same area of the curriculum that will make the learning relevant to the pupils' own lives while enabling success for differing needs and abilities.

There were examples of good practice where pupils were well engaged by lessons. A Key Stage 2 pupil was reluctant to stop working on his computer game at break time. An Year 9 pupil was keen to explain to the visitor the system used to enable people to excrete while in space. Other pupils had scant interest in the work presented: they were compliant and recognized the need to complete it.

In the lessons visited, pupils were encouraged to use the National Curriculum levels to assess their work. However, pupils' lack of a working knowledge of their strengths and areas for development suggests that the exercise may have limited value. In some lessons, there was a lot of teacher talk and direction from TAs, thus reducing opportunities for pupils to express themselves, listen to others and develop study skills. The small size of some classes with high absence rates limits the possibility for structured discussions to take place. Some pupils interviewed, when asked how provision might be improved, suggested that more pupils in lessons would help them to learn, for example, how to control their anger. Anger management is not seen by pupils to be an issue because they are not under any stress in the centres. Nevertheless, pupils' inability to deal with stress is clearly a problem for many excluded pupils.

There was an emphasis on completing worksheets in some lessons, possibly driven by the need to promote literacy. There was little evidence of writing for a purpose and pupils actively engaged in their own learning. The exceptions were the control technology lessons with Key Stage 2 pupils, where pupils were using a software programme to make a game. This held pupils' attention very well in the lessons and they were animated about their discoveries. However, this was a stand-alone lesson that did not link with any other learning as would be the case in a good primary classroom. Libraries are beginning to be developed, but there is little evidence yet of reading for pleasure. Phonics is beginning to be taught, often through computer programmes.

The pupils' work contained evidence of marking, but no evidence of any response from pupils. Best practice would encourage a dialogue about the learning and evidence of acting on suggestions for improvement. Those pupils interviewed said that they did not read teachers' comments. It might be helpful to explore reasons for this. Is it due to their weak literacy skills, the difficulty of reading the teachers' writing, the difficulty in understanding what they have achieved and how to improve, a lack of concern for the feedback, or lack of engagement with the task?

Sheets showing National Curriculum levels were often to be found into pupils' books with some highlighting to indicate achievement. Staff might explore more ways to demonstrate to pupils smaller successes in their learning as well as realistic suggestions for improvement. There was little evidence of pupils interacting with their targets throughout the day. Those targets seen were not always SMART and did not always include small steps for reaching them. Pupils find the reward system powerful, but it does not relate to pupils' individual targets. The review of progress against their targets might be more effective for pupils if it occurred more frequently on the basis of pupils' experiences of success. It might be helpful to separate what needs to be reinforced and reviewed daily from what evidence is needed by SLT fortnightly.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management have suffered from the absence of a substantive headteacher. The acting headteacher has a very different leadership style where the expectation is that the leaders in each centre will take greater responsibility. Nevertheless, the improvement documents examined are too general and do not contain sufficient focus and structure for active engagement with the process of change. For example, there is a heavy emphasis on training staff and putting systems and structures in place, but not a lot

of emphasis on specific issues that have been identified within each centre regarding the quality of learning for pupils. Consequently, outcomes are descriptive and do not focus sufficiently on changed behaviours for staff and improved achievement for particular groups of pupils.

Ofsted pointed to the lack of monitoring of teaching and learning. The perception that observations are stressful indicates that the centre does not have a strong 'can do' ethos. The monitoring of practice, as opposed to intentions, is beginning to occur through learning walks and unannounced observations. However, it is not yet well established as a helpful process and there are inconsistencies between observers. While staff are now being encouraged to become more solution orientated, there is still a tendency to address inadequacies in pupils' backgrounds and perceived lack of support from the LA and mainstream schools.

An in-depth review of safeguarding has already taken place. Procedures are said to be robust. No safeguarding issues relating to the centres was apparent during visits.

The high staff absence is acknowledged in the improvement planning. However, there are few strategies for systematic and frequent reviews about successful teaching and joint problem solving. In a high stress situation, where pupils' have developed extremely challenging behaviours, staff often find this a helpful strategy.

The need for staff's wider understanding of possibilities and higher expectations is beginning to be recognized and some staff are visiting other settings. Nevertheless, there is limited evidence of how staff will use these opportunities to change their own practice.

Ofsted recommended the development of the curriculum. The curriculum at the time of the visits appeared to be a traditionally secondary model. It is not clear, therefore, what would entice a reluctant teenager out of bed to come to school. Plans are afoot to develop the curriculum, but the changes agreed may not yet be sufficiently radical to hold pupils in school. There clearly needs to be a tailored balance between the taught curriculum, opportunities for nurture, and opportunities for therapy and enrichment, as well as a better balance between support and challenge. It is also important that heavy emphasis in all areas be laid on speech, language and communication skills. There are currently limited strategies for hooking pupils back into learning. Lessons did not appear to focus on the benefits for pupils of the activities beyond moving to the next National Curriculum level or achieving exam passes. There was little evidence of developing literacy to enable them to access learning more effectively, except through English lessons. Interviews with pupils revealed their real enjoyment of activities in the past such as the bike project and Right Track (sports). Given the framework provided by the national strategies and the National Curriculum, it should be possible to plan work that promotes pupils' literacy and numeracy, while doing activities that they find interesting. There is scope for better joint planning of the curriculum with pupils to meet their individual needs.

The curriculum for primary pupils does not reflect an integrated, creative curriculum, although staff are currently working on developments. In each centre, Key Stage 2 pupils are isolated from their peers and from other pupils. This may not be the most enabling environment within which to address their needs and enable them to re-integrate.

One local secondary school that has recently become an academy has devised a preventative system that includes support from ex-convicts. There are opportunities for

learning positive ways to deal with violence and strategies for developing inner strength and calm, such as mediation. This model would appear to be innovative and enabling for pupils.

Although there are often daily links with parents, there is little evidence of proactive support for them in terms of parenting workshops. Parents say that the centres are very helpful and remark upon how much more settled their children are because they have been given a break from mainstream pressures. They are clearly weary of the amount of negative feedback they have received from their mainstream schools.

The work of the Liaison Leaders is much appreciated by mainstream schools who refer to the prompt response from centre staff who are competent and have a fund of helpful strategies. Schools are enormously grateful for the support of The Learning Centre.

The strengths of The Learning Centre staff identified by mainstream heads include:

- helpful, supportive, and flexible staff who give good advice;
- proactive, cooperative and accessible staff;
- rapid response in times of need;
- their ability to work with families and support agencies e.g. CAMHS
- the opportunities to have 'at risk' pupils visit the centre to see how life would be if they were excluded;
- considerable skills and expertise within The Learning Centre;
- close partnership with school staff to support a previously excluded pupil during re-integration.

There were specific case studies quoted by some headteachers.

a) A secondary school had substantial help when two pupils were on the brink of permanent exclusion.

The Learning Centre provided significant support for a Year 7 SEND pupil. As a result, the environment was modified, he was put on a dual placement with The Learning Centre, and specialist support was introduced.

Another pupil came to school with a knife. With the help of The Learning Centre staff, it was established that there were mitigating circumstances, but also issues to be addressed. Without the support of The Learning Centre the school would not have got such an accurate assessment of his needs.

b) A primary headteacher described how The Learning Centre supported the school through a referrals, advice and enabling the pupil to spend time at The Learning Centre. They continued to support the pupil when he was back in school.

Views of school and centre staff, and parents regarding current provision and the future

Seven headteachers were telephoned and gave their views about the improvements for excluded pupils in the future. Local headteachers would like:

- better assessments of individual needs of vulnerable pupils in mainstream schools;
- more specialist input earlier in a vulnerable pupil's school career;
- a designated link that they could call on, on a day to day basis, to work intensively with a vulnerable pupil to prevent exclusion;
- someone to come in when necessary to observe those at risk to identify where the problems lie, for example, with the pupil or the environment;
- support at transition stage for vulnerable pupils;
- more time and expertise post re-integration, 'not just a TA';

the re-integration process to be speeded up;
greater parity in the way schools work with the Learning Centre, for example, some schools do not shoulder their responsibility for taking back excluded pupils so that they receive their entitlement;
their own staff to benefit from training by the Learning Centre staff in behaviour management skills;
the Centre to work with them to extend mediation, modify behaviour, and teach pupils how to deal with violence;
some separate provision within the Authority for extreme cases.

A Local councilor stated that The Learning Centre is doing a 'fantastic' job, but is struggling to move pupils on. There is a perception that although academies have a high exclusion rate, they are reluctant to take any pupils back. She believes the identification of pupils' needs is left too late in mainstream schools and some of them are erratic about their record keeping. For example, she came across a 13/14 year old girl with a reading age of 4 who had recently been excluded.

Centre staff

Staff at all levels were interviewed. There were many ideas for improving the service. In the short term, staff are working on a revised curriculum, and visiting other institutions to see good practice. Some staff see an urgent need for wider repertoire of approaches used in The Learning Centre to engaging pupils in order to develop basic skills e.g. age appropriate phonics; opportunities for play for pupils, many of whom have missed out on this aspect of their development.

Some staff identified the need for a clearer focus on ways of improving The Learning Centre and the need for dynamic leadership. A relevant curriculum should address barriers to learning for the whole child including access to therapy and nurture. Some staff identified a need to change the culture. For example, at Bassetlaw parents and their families and their children prefer the provision at the centre over that provided in a mainstream setting. The parents of some pupils also attended the centre. Attendance at the centre is seen as an easy option by some pupils who work towards being excluded from mainstream for this reason. There is scope, too, for challenging low expectations and the complacency of some staff in order to achieve a better balance between challenge and support.

Although it has improved, some staff feel that there is still a need for closer work with outside agencies, e.g CAMHS to address pupils' barriers. There is a belief that more pupils with long-term needs are being excluded, but a lack of provision for the most needy pupils with extremely challenging behaviour.

Staff also point to the necessity of working more closely with mainstream schools. They suggested developing an honest conversation in order to build relationships with mainstream schools, because some of them are not owning the whole process. Schools should recognise earlier that they cannot cope, for example, if a pupil is not making progress, then there is a problem that needs to be promptly addressed. Furthermore, there should be better support to prevent potential exclusions, through sharing the good practice of successful SBAPs

They would like more schools should be encouraged to take pupils who are ready for re-integration, and more qualified staff should be available in school to support those pupils.

In order to do this, there should be more exchanges between the staff at the centre and those in mainstream schools. Slack times, such as that at the end of summer term, might be used to provide preventative programmes for example for vulnerable pupils at transition.

With respect to the local Authority, staff would like more clarity about the purpose of The Learning Centre. They did not feel that there had been sufficient recognition of their role in liaison with parents and outside agencies. They believe there is little understanding of the very difficult home circumstances of pupils and the pressures faced by teachers in supporting those in their charge and other professionals.

Staff believe that future re-organisation should ensure a distinct focus for each district because they have different needs and issues. For example, some districts have better access to Key Stage 4 provision and there is virtually no provision for Level 2 qualifications at Key Stage 4 across the Authority.

A number of staff favoured a model of provision that is overseen by a group of schools who know who the vulnerable pupils are and ensure positive outcomes for each. Schools should have ownership of different centres and work towards abolishing the notion of permanent exclusion so that no pupil is totally rejected.

Parents

Interviews with parents were very positive and they felt that The Learning Centre was beneficial for their children. They identified the reduction in pressure for them and their children, because of the small groups and one to one work. The main points from their discussions are listed below.

Y9 pupil has *started to learn*, staff are fair and work well with parents;

Y11 pupil *would not have passed his exams*; he has *grown up a bit*; staff did a *really good job*;

Y8 pupil has *gained independence*; the staff *have done what others didn't do*; staff *worked 1-1 and gave her a lot of time*;

Y5 *calmed down a lot*, doesn't get so angry;

Y5 has *come on loads*; *can add up using his fingers*; *can pick out words*; *his whole attitude has changed*; staff are doing a *fantastic job*.

Y5 in the centre for a year: *has made lots of progress*; *staff have given him more time in a smaller group*; *there's no bullying*; *teachers are respectful*; *staff explain things to him*; *encourage healthy eating*; *build his confidence*; *more understanding with his reading and writing*. She was not sure what the rewards are for. She was concerned about what will happen to him when he returns to mainstream.

Y10 has improved *brilliantly* since he has been on medication; most of the time he enjoys being in the centre. He finds it easier to relate to others at the centre, he gets on well with staff and is treated like an adult. The parent said he was trying to find out about his academic progress. He was grateful that his son was better engaged at the centre because he was being left behind in mainstream. He is *a lot calmer and easier to manage*. *The work is easier and the rules are easier*.

Y9 parent was not sure whether he has improved, but felt that if he had been given medication earlier he would not have been excluded. Staff are very supportive. *Even though the medication makes him sick, he still goes to school*. Time in the centre has given him breathing space and has taken the pressure off. Her concern about him going to the centre and mixing with other pupils proved to be unfounded.

Staff have sent a card home about his good progress in maths. She speaks every other day with school staff and believes that the exclusion was a *bit of a blip*. Y10 *knuckled down* and is *looking at colleges*. He has made a couple of CDs working with Stone Soup and wants to study music and media. He has taken two exams and got a trophy that he *would not have got were he still in mainstream*. He *has gained in confidence* and is *better engaged*. He *gets up in the morning first time of asking* and wants to come to school. His attendance has improved *no end*. Staff talk to pupils *like human beings*. His parents are grateful for the space for him to focus, and the time and patience of the staff.

Recommendations for Local Authority

In order to establish an efficient system for meeting the needs of excluded pupils;

Resolve The Learning Centre headship issue as soon as possible;

Work with mainstream schools on strategies for:

- early identification of needs in primary schools and
- supporting vulnerable pupils at transition to secondary and further education;
- supporting the re-integration of pupils particularly into secondary schools ;
- reducing the number of permanent exclusions, particularly boys and those identified as SA+.

In order to review the impact of provision at The Learning Centre, monitor on an annual basis,

- the attendance and progress of pupils in each centre against PSA targets;
- the views of The Learning Centre staff;
- exclusions from mainstream schools and in relation to judgements about behaviour and safety;
- exclusions from The Learning Centre;

Audit provision for Key Stage 4 pupils across the Authority to ensure entitlement for those in The Learning Centre;

Identify provision for pupils with extremely challenging behaviour;

Ensure better induction for staff joining The Learning Centre from mainstream;

Review and streamline the procedures of the Day 55 Panel;

With The Learning Centre, mainstream staff and outside agencies, agree a model of re-organisation that addresses:

- The distinct nature of each district;
- Ownership of excluded pupils by mainstream schools;
- A reduction in the exclusion of vulnerable pupils;
- More holistic provision for Key Stage 2 pupils;
- Possibilities of e-learning provision;
- The recommendations in the Charlie Taylor Report.

Recommendation for The Learning Centre

Develop the quality of monitoring and evaluation by:

- Establishing feedback systems for regular gathering the views of all pupils on roll, and all staff in order to focus the whole centre planning;
- Obtaining more comprehensive entry information from mainstream schools regarding each pupil;
- Providing more frequent timetabled opportunities to discuss and address pupils' progress, educationally, socially, behaviourally, and emotionally;
- Improve the systems for monitoring the progress of those pupils educated off-site;

Ensuring the full use by teachers of records that show starting points, progress - educationally, socially, behaviourally and emotionally – in their planning;
Building action planning from monitoring data and outcomes relate to intended impact on pupils' progress and teacher's practice;
Setting up more solution groups with tight deadlines to support staff and hold them to account;

Improve teaching and learning by

Extending the repertoire of strategies used by teachers to meet the wide range of pupils' needs within relevant contexts;
Giving greater prominence in lessons to what pupils have learned and how to improve;
Giving pupils exciting and memorable experiences to talk and write about;
Helping pupils to make connections between their learning and their lives;
Using all available information to generate SMART targets that are used in all contexts and that are quickly achieved;
Review targets daily and agree future actions.

Develop the leadership and management throughout the centre by:

Extending staff leadership skills at all levels;
Provide peer counselling for staff as an entitlement
Systematically working with pupils to plan their future.

Develop the curriculum by:

making it active, practical and relevant to pupils' lives at all levels whilst embedding basic skills;
Tailoring the curriculum to the individual needs and abilities through joint planning with pupils;
Enriching the curriculum with other activities and opportunities and therapies.

Develop the work with families by:

Setting up parent/carer workshops and family learning opportunities;
Engaging families more closely in understanding their children's needs, abilities and progress.

Provide CPD for mainstream colleagues through:

Joint moderation of pupils' work;
Providing courses on behaviour management
Giving them strategies for preventing exclusions of vulnerable pupils
Supporting vulnerable pupils through critical periods in their school career.

Kathy Hooper
Education Consultant/Inspector

C0269a