

**An Exploratory Case Study of a ‘Successful’ Pupil
Referral Unit (PRU).**

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Abstract

This thesis is an exploratory case study that investigates a successful pupil referral unit (PRU) for key stage 3 secondary school pupils located in the semi-rural southwest of England. The achievement of the PRU was externally acknowledged by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) with a recently reported overall grade of 1 or 'Outstanding'. This exploratory study took a social constructionist approach and was informed by the methodology of illuminative evaluation. This study explored the stories and experiences of pupils and staff using interviews, a focus group and video diaries for the pupils. The analysis of these data was from a socio-cultural theoretical perspective. The research data suggested that success was in a state of flux for all in the PRU. For pupils there were personal transformations in their attitudes, behaviours and values. Pupils' social and emotional capital was increased by the 'deep relationships' that developed between pupils and staff. The innovative approach to the curriculum allowed pupils to engage positively with education and featured lessons that were routinely based upon experiential learning. This included weekly outdoor learning lessons which provided a rich context for informal learning to take place alongside the formal objectives. Leadership and management appeared to be the keystone of the PRU success. There was a clear well founded educational philosophy that was successfully articulated through the operational systems of the PRU. All of these parts contributed to the holistic success of the PRU. Findings from this case study are not generalisable due to its specificity to one particular setting and small number of participants. However, 'naturalistic generalisations' may be arrived at by the reader. For example, the reader may be able to apply some aspects of good practice, such as developing deep relationships, to their own context when working with those pupils who are, or have the potential to be, disaffected.

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