

Northfields Education Centre

Inspection report

Unique reference number	134699
Local authority	Somerset
Inspection number	381717
Inspection dates	22–23 February 2012
Lead inspector	Charles Hackett

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Pupil Referral Unit
School category	Pupil Referral Unit
Age range of pupils	5–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	19
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Headteacher	Sarah Briton
Date of previous school inspection	23 October 2008
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Introduction

Inspection team

Charles Hackett

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspector visited seven lessons, observing five of the six part-time teachers employed by the centre. Meetings were held with staff, the local authority line manager for the centre, the link officer for the local children and adolescent mental health service (CAMHS) and a member of the management committee. A telephone discussion was held with the special educational needs coordinator of a secondary school whose students can access the centre. Discussions were held with students about their work and views of the centre.

The inspector took account of the responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, observed the centre's work, and looked at students' work and information on their progress; safeguarding policies and other documents were evaluated. Questionnaires completed by seven parents and carers, 11 staff and 10 students were scrutinised.

Information about the school

Northfields Education Centre is a smaller than average pupil referral unit. It provides a support service to students who are unable to attend full-time education in mainstream schools for medical reasons. The service is provided through:

- an outreach service where students are taught individually in a range of settings as determined by their medical needs or through a virtual classroom accessed through the internet, where students are able to log on to lessons delivered by a member of the centre's staff
- a centre in Taunton for students in Years 10 and 11, for whom a return to mainstream school has been agreed by all concerned at a formal multi-professional meeting to be unlikely to be successful
- a unit sited in the children's ward at Musgrove Park Hospital for in-patients who live in Somerset, as well as those who reside in other counties within the South West of England.

At the time of the inspection, only secondary age students were on the roll of the centre. Only in exceptional circumstances are students at the Musgrove Park unit placed on the roll of the centre. During the inspection, there was only one such student, who it was not possible to meet. Therefore the Musgrove unit was not part of this inspection. Very few disabled pupils and those with special educational needs are admitted to the centre.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	1
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- Northfields Education Centre is a good pupil referral unit. It works very effectively with the children and adolescent mental health service and hospital paediatricians to support the positive engagement of students in learning. It is not outstanding because of inconsistencies in the marking of students' work and the limited involvement of its management committee.
- Achievement is good. Students respond very well to the positive welcoming approach taken by all staff. They improve their attendance and, as a result, many recover the learning lost and missed through their illnesses or surgery. Students with literacy difficulties make good progress because of the strong focus given to supporting them in the teaching of all subjects.
- Teaching is effective. Teachers focus on the individual needs of each student using a wide range of creative skills to facilitate their engagement in learning. There is, though, some inconsistency in the use of marking to assess students' progress and suggest what they need to do to improve.
- The behaviour and safety of students is outstanding. Incidents of unacceptable behaviour are extremely rare and no incidents of bullying have been recorded for many years. The strong promotion of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development helps foster students' vastly improved confidence to deal with new challenges and engage with the local community.
- The headteacher has brought increased rigour to the monitoring of the school's performance and provided good leadership to improve the quality of teaching. She has established a staff team determined to meet the needs of each individual student. The management committee seeks to support the centre, but it is not sufficiently involved or knowledgeable about the centre's work to be in a position to contribute sufficiently or hold it to account.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- By July 2012, raise the quality and impact of teaching so that all students make even better progress, through developing an effective marking policy which enables students to know how well they are achieving and ensures that they know what they need to do to achieve even more.

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- By September 2012, increase the role played by the management committee in the centre's pursuit of excellence through:
 - increasing its contributions and involvement in the monitoring and evaluating of the centre's provision and the outcomes for students
 - increasing its participation in the implementation of well-focused improvement plans.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Students achieve well because of the strong focus given to addressing their individual needs. Parents and carers fully concur with this view. Typically in lessons, students respond very well, being receptive to the academic and pastoral support provided. This was seen in a 'preparation for life' lesson, when the four students each followed individual tasks linked to their specific aspirations for educational placement after leaving the centre. The students listened carefully to advice in undertaking tasks such as writing up their work experience diary or completing their curriculum vitae. Students' increased confidence allows them to take part in projects linked to voluntary work, work experience and attend taster courses at the local college.

Students make good progress in the use of information and communication technology. For example, in a mathematics lesson, two students followed programmes on their computer which demonstrated how to draw different shapes, for example a hexagon. Outreach students, often too unwell to attend the centre, are engaging in learning successfully through the use of the virtual classroom. One student, confined to his home, logged on to a mathematics lesson for the first time. He communicated by text to the teacher and, by the end of the lesson, was able to ask questions to develop his skills further.

Students' literacy skills improve through the centre's emphasis on reading and writing in the teaching of other subjects. A student previously reluctant to engage in a literacy programme is now making very good progress in his reading and writing skills through taking part in a project involved in making different types of bread. Students are sufficiently confident to read aloud in lessons; two students studying Romeo and Juliet read out extracts of the story that they were working together to put in the right sequence of events.

Students work very hard and a scrutiny of their work, including of those who are taught individually in a range of settings, shows that their progress is good. Two students, who discussed their science work with the inspector, were able to show from their coursework that they were achieving well on their GCSE course. This meant that both were making good progress in narrowing the gap to the nationally expected attainment levels. Students' attainment, including in reading, is broadly average, but varies due to the range of students the centre supports. The wealth of

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data on each student shows that there is no significant variation between any different groups of students, including the very few disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, that attend the centre.

Quality of teaching

Teaching in all subjects of the curriculum is effective in addressing the needs of students. The strong focus on their spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development broadens their horizons and helps develop their interests in a wide range of topics. Teachers and assistants create a safe and secure learning environment where students are confident to make contributions. This was seen in the virtual classroom lessons, where students have the option of responding privately to the teacher through confidential texts. Now, though, many are becoming sufficiently confident to respond and interact openly with other students in each group. Teachers are skilled at encouraging students to think through problems independently. In a science lesson, the student responded to the good questioning of the teacher to use his prior knowledge to hypothesise what might happen in his experiment of wetting wire wool to remove oxygen from the air.

Teachers are very effective at using humour to diffuse and redirect students when they may be feeling distressed. The curriculum has a positive impact on developing students' interest in a range of projects and, because teachers are very creative in planning activities, students enjoy learning. As a result of teachers' excellent knowledge of each student, they are highly effective in balancing the expectations and challenge for learning with the advice they receive from health professionals. Skills in this were seen in a mathematics lesson, when students struggled with the use of a compass to draw shapes, for example hexagons. The teacher recognised the pressure this was putting on one student and quickly averted any undue stress by changing the activity to a less challenging, but still appropriate one.

Each student is supported by having a key teacher, who meets with them regularly to discuss progress and any issues with their work. This works very well. Students' work, though, is not always marked and rarely graded to show the level of achievement it represents. This reduces students' understanding of how well they are doing and what they need to do to make even further progress. Parents and carers consider teaching to be very effective, but the weaknesses in marking are an important reason why it is not judged to be outstanding.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students, parents and carers are all very confident that behaviour and safety are excellent. Each school day runs smoothly because of the very high levels of respect and courtesy students show towards both staff and each other and their excellent behaviour. Students are polite and welcoming to visitors, as was demonstrated by their willingness to discuss their work with the inspector. In lessons, students cooperate with each other extremely well, such as in a first-aid lesson with an outside tutor, when they worked very well together acting in turn to be either the

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patient or first-aider fitting bandages.

Records confirm the high quality of behaviour over time and indicate that there have been no significant behaviour incidents and no incidents of bullying of any type in recent years. A student confirmed this by writing on his questionnaire 'I haven't seen any bullying at the school.' The centre provides students with excellent support to understand the dangers of internet use. During both of the virtual-classroom lessons observed, the teachers placed a strong emphasis on ensuring that students understood possible dangers. This was seen to particular good effect when a new student joined the classroom for the first time. The teacher went through the risks associated with the use of the internet very carefully.

Safety is given a very high priority throughout the centre. Students stress how safe they feel in the centre. Although students are encouraged to go out into the community, this is only done after careful risk assessments have been undertaken. Students' response to feeling safe at school results very often in their attendance improving considerably from when they were last at a secondary school. Many build up their attendance from using the virtual classroom to attending for a few hours to finally becoming full-time attendees at the centre.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management provided by the headteacher are inspirational. Her determination for excellence has ensured that there is clarity to the purpose of the centre and considerable rigour in the monitoring of its performance. Improvements over time have greatly enhanced the effectiveness of the service. The issues identified in the previous inspection, such as the quality of the curriculum and the teaching time offered, have been tackled successfully. The improvement to the curriculum gives students excellent opportunities to pass many different forms of external accreditation, including GCSEs. These improvements and the clear vision for the future show that the centre's capacity for sustained improvement is good. Equality of opportunity is promoted very carefully and no form of discrimination is tolerated. The headteacher has ensured that there is a team of staff committed to ensuring that students potentially disadvantaged by illness are, in the words of a member of the management committee, 'advantaged by being attached to the centre'.

Detailed and well-prioritised improvement plans for the last three years and thorough monitoring by the headteacher have provided a strong foundation for securing improvements. A key focus in the plans, acknowledged by the local authority as previously a weakness in the centre, has been on improving the quality of teaching. The fact that teaching is now good reflects the positive support given to teachers, which has included good training opportunities. The management committee has supported the development of good partnerships with other schools and agencies and placed a strong emphasis on safeguarding. That includes ensuring there are rigorous risk assessments of all activities on and off site. The management committee has, though, played little part in monitoring the quality of the centre's

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work, the outcomes for students, and the priorities for its future development.

The much-improved curriculum is broad and balanced. It meets students' individual needs well, with its different methods of delivery, including the virtual classroom. The centre places a strong emphasis on promoting the spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development of students. The curriculum includes daily welcoming meetings, which cover a wide range of social and cultural topics. The strong push to involve students in the local community through planned visits enhances their confidence in a wide range of social situations. The school has successfully engaged with parents and carers, who themselves are very positive about the work of the centre. 'They are a fantastic dedicated team who have made a big difference to... in the most positive of ways' is typical of the complimentary comments made by parents and carers.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance:	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour:	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Safety:	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



24 February 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of Northfields Education Centre, Taunton TA1 5DR

Thank you for your kindness and hospitality when I visited your centre recently. I enjoyed meeting so many of you and looking at your work. I especially enjoyed tasting the bread and joining you for coffee and fruit at break time. Because you told me how good the service is, I am sure you will not be surprised to know that I, too, have judged your centre to be good.

I consider both your achievements and the quality of teaching to be good. Those of you who join the virtual classrooms do very well to engage in learning despite your illnesses. I judge that your behaviour and safety are all outstanding and the way the centre promotes your spiritual, social, moral, and cultural development is strong. I can see that for many of you this is giving you the confidence to do far more in the community.

The centre has improved a lot since its last inspection. Much of this is due to the good leadership and management of the headteacher and her hard-working team of staff. It is clear that all are determined to support you and enable you to achieve. To be even better, I have recommended two areas of improvement to the school.

- Make sure that the marking of your work assesses how well you are doing and helps you know what you need to do to make even more progress.
- The management committee to offer more support in making sure the school achieves its ambition to be excellent.

Once again, thank you for making my job so enjoyable when I came to visit.

Yours sincerely

Charles Hackett
Lead inspector

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