

First Base

Inspection report

Unique reference number	131822
Local authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	381410
Inspection dates	1–2 March 2012
Lead inspector	Ronald Hall

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	3–8
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	20
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Chair	Margaret Durrant
Headteacher	Heather Madsen
Date of previous school inspection	19 March 2009
School address	34 Ashley Downs Lowestoft NR32 4EX
Telephone number	01502 512963
Fax number	01502 516525
Email address	ht.firstbase@talk21.com

Age group	3–8
Inspection date(s)	1–2 March 2012
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Introduction

Inspection team

Ronald Hall

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Five lessons were observed taught by one teacher and one lesson being supported by a Behavioural Support Assistant, covering over three and a half hours. The inspector took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, observed the school's work, and looked at a range of documentation including that relating to pupils' progress, school improvement and the safeguarding and care of pupils. Meetings were held with staff, members of the management committee, and informally with pupils. The inspector observed the school's work in a primary school as well as within the provision itself. The inspector took account of the views of six parents and carers who returned the questionnaires sent out prior to the inspection.

Information about the school

First Base is a small pupil referral unit that provides support and education for pupils in North Suffolk who have difficulties in their early years setting or school. The provision has one main site, a satellite provision as well as outreach support. Pupils have behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, such as attention deficit hyperactive disorder, autism, dyslexia and problems with communication. None of the 20 pupils on roll has a statement of special educational needs. Several are undergoing statutory assessments. The headteacher has been in post just over a year.

First Base supports pupils for up to three terms. Pupils attend for one or two days a week while continuing to attend their early years setting or mainstream school. The outreach service supports a further 17 pupils in schools who have behavioural difficulties. Training and support are provided to schools and pupils' parents and carers to improve their capacity to manage challenging behaviour. It is rare for children below school age to attend First Base, but the school maintains an Early Years Foundation Stage provision to support children in early years settings. First Base holds Healthy School Status, the Basic Skills Quality Mark and Eco Schools Silver Flag.

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	1

Key findings

- This is a good pupil referral unit, which pupils enjoy attending. It is exceptionally well thought of by the mainstream schools it supports and the local authority. Its success is based on extremely good relationships with the pupils, parents and carers and other schools. It is not outstanding because teaching is not consistently good enough to promote outstanding achievement.
- Achievement is good for all groups of pupils, and attainment is broadly average. Good support for language and communication skills results in pupils spending no longer than three terms in the provision. Ongoing support following their return to mainstream school precludes any further behavioural issues.
- Teaching has rapidly improved. It is now consistently at least good, and some lessons are outstanding. Teachers generally teach reading well but the teaching of phonics (the sounds that letters make) is not yet as effective. Teachers are skilled at challenging pupils, but do not always make the most of opportunities to extend pupils' knowledge and skills into their everyday lives.
- Pupils' behaviour is outstanding and they rapidly acquire a very positive attitude to learning, feel exceptionally safe and trust the staff implicitly. They have contributed to the excellent safety checks and systems. Pupils have an excellent understanding of how to keep themselves safe, respect each other and socialise very well.
- Leadership and management are outstanding. The changes made have resulted in marked improvements in teaching and the curriculum. In turn, this has led to all pupils achieving well and making rapid progress. Assessment procedures provide very good information on which teachers can base future learning. Systems to monitor pupils' achievement once they return to their mainstream schools are at an earlier stage of development.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise the quality of teaching so that the vast majority is outstanding by April 2013, by:
 - developing all teachers' expertise in teaching phonics skills
 - ensuring that teachers extend learning beyond the classroom consistently well.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Pupils achieve well and reach standards in line with age-expected levels. They make good progress because they are well taught through a curriculum that is effectively matched to their individual needs and are strongly supported in improving their attitudes towards learning. For example, in a good literacy and reading lesson pupils explored the feelings of characters in a story and this was well linked to their own feelings and fears. This type of approach has led to pupils leaving the provision with reading skills broadly in line with those expected nationally. Parents and carers justifiably express a high degree of satisfaction. All pupils make rapid progress from low baselines, which are the result of a previously disrupted education. Many pupils have specific learning difficulties, relating to their communication and language skills. There is a sharp focus on helping pupils to overcome these difficulties. Good teaching, often on a one-to-one basis for those with the greatest degree of difficulty, succeeds in closing the gap between pupils' reading, writing, spelling and communication skills and those expected nationally. The work in pupils' books and files shows that they are making good and sometimes particularly rapid progress. Pupils work hard and take pride in their work.

Although pupils attend the provision for a relatively short time, robust recording systems provide accurate data on their attainment and progress. An important indicator of achievement is the successful return to mainstream education. Conversations with several headteachers during the inspection clearly demonstrated that they feel this is an exemplary element of the provision.

Quality of teaching

Pupils, parents and carers agree that teaching is good. Since appointing permanent staff, issues that once hindered teaching have been resolved and improvement has been rapid and secure since the appointment of the current headteacher. All teaching observed during the inspection was at least good and sometimes outstanding, tallying with the more extensive results of monitoring by senior leaders. Teachers are particularly skilled in identifying existing knowledge and understanding, filling gaps and building on prior learning. Good promotion of numeracy and literacy skills is clearly evident in all lessons in addition to mathematics and English. For example, pupils accurately measure and mark out dimensions when designing the

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planting area in the gardening sessions and in science lessons where they consolidate specialist vocabulary.

The teaching of phonics is good, although occasional slips in pronunciation are not always corrected. The school is aware that all staff have not had enough training in this area. Particularly good communication between pupils and adults helps pupils to understand how to improve their work and reach the higher levels. However, there is some inconsistency in the way in which teachers extend learning beyond the classroom, so that pupils understand how they can use their skills, knowledge and understanding in their everyday lives. In lessons, constant verbal feedback and marking and annotation of pupils' work provide further encouragement. Skilled questioning of pupils helps to involve them all equally, and helps teachers to evaluate their understanding and progress.

Teachers and classroom assistants manage behaviour exceptionally well. This is done with subtlety and based on excellent relationships. The curriculum is exceptionally well planned to secure pupils' interest and engagement. Teachers carefully choose activities that motivate and engage pupils, for instance by using texts that engage them. In lessons, teachers expertly capitalise on the sub-text of these stories to promote pupils' spiritual and moral development. All pupils report that staff help them to do as well as they can and explain how they can improve their work.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils have contributed to the safety of the unit by suggesting improvements to the buildings and grounds, and these have been implemented by the school. All pupils attend the centre because their behaviour, social or emotional needs have been deemed challenging by the mainstream settings. Rapid improvements ensure that a successful return to mainstream school is facilitated. All pupils are very positive about behaviour. As one put it, 'We were naughty in school but not now.' All feel that behaviour in lessons is excellent. During the inspection, nothing but exemplary behaviour was seen in the unit and school settings. The headteachers of the primary schools were more than happy to confirm this as being typical.

Diligently kept records show that there are only very occasional instances of misbehaviour, and no exclusions. There have been no instances of bullying of any kind, and pupils confirm this is the case and recording documents are accurate. There have been no issues relating to racism, sexist or homophobic behaviour. Pupils are unanimous in saying that staff deal with all types of issues arising very well. A programme of family support is extremely well implemented by staff to help parents and carers in their efforts to improve their children's conduct.

Pupils demonstrate excellent attitudes to learning. They take great pride in their work and try hard to do their best in lessons. Pupils are fully involved in assessing their own performance and that of others in terms of the choices they make in different situations, their achievement of targets, the respect they show and the efforts they make. This was exemplified by one pupil's comment when asked about

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another's contribution to the morning: 'I think he has been outstanding this morning because he has been a real friend to me today and helped me a lot.' This strong practice is underpinned by a good reward system that reflects progress. Attendance is high and the work carried out by the staff ensures this continues to be the case back in the pupils' mainstream settings. Both pupils and staff feel very safe and parents and carers unanimously and justifiably concur.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management at all levels, including governance by the local authority and management committee, are outstanding. Equality of opportunity is strongly promoted, discrimination is not tolerated and arrangements for safeguarding are exemplary. In fact, the systems are used as a model by the local authority for other provisions. Both the main site and outreach unit are very skilfully and effectively managed on a day-to-day basis by the headteacher and senior teachers. The headteacher's excellent ambition and vision inspire the staff. This has led to rapid and sustained improvement in teaching, the curriculum and the work to support other schools, with a highly positive impact on pupils' outcomes. Excellent monitoring and promotion of improvements in teaching and learning are characterised by an extensive programme of continuous professional development for all staff. This carefully balances different aspects of provision such as teaching, the curriculum, the care of pupils, their behaviour and their safeguarding. A particularly outstanding aspect of the programme is the substantial opportunities it offers staff to develop their skills and responsibilities. For instance, it fully supports teaching assistants to become qualified teachers and helps teachers to gain higher-level specialist qualifications.

Teaching has demonstratively improved in recent years. Target setting for individuals and guidance as to how they can achieve their targets are now significant strengths. Extensive and effective strategies to improve attendance have radically reduced the number of absentees, to the point where overall attendance is high and this continues in the pupils' school settings. These substantial improvements demonstrate an excellent capacity to improve further.

The unit provides a broad, balanced and highly relevant personalised curriculum. There is a strong focus on promoting essential basic skills such as literacy and numeracy, and good promotion of information and communication technology skills. Personal, social and health education underpins much of the unit's work and pervades the whole curriculum. All pupils have extensive opportunities to develop their practical skills. The curriculum strongly promotes physical activity and engenders a high degree of aesthetic appreciation. It complements the mainstream school curriculum, to which pupils are expected to return, exceptionally well.

The school makes an outstanding contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. They are strongly guided to rediscover a sense of pride in their achievements and a sense of self-worth. They develop an excellent understanding of how their actions affect other peoples' lives; they learn how to contribute to society

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and how to get on better with each other, and gain a good understanding of their own and other people's cultures. This is exemplified by an excellent range of pictures they have produced to show how people live in a range of other countries.

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.



5 March 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of First Base, Lowestoft, NR32 4EX

Thank you for making me so welcome when I visited First Base. I came to inspect your pupil referral unit and judge how well you are getting on. What I saw was good. I was pleased to find out that you feel very safe and that you feel the unit is helping you to improve your work. It was good to hear you say that your teachers expect you to work hard and always do your best. I agree.

I saw you making good progress in all of your lessons. You are achieving well across the wide range of subjects across your good and rapidly improving curriculum, especially in English and mathematics. You are developing excellent attitudes to learning and behaving exceptionally well. This is helping all of you to get back to your mainstream schools quickly. Teaching in the First Base is good and rapidly improving. I have asked the headteacher to improve this further by ensuring your teachers help you to understand how what you learn can be used beyond school, and to improve your teachers' skills at teaching phonics so that you can make even quicker progress.

The First Base operates on two different sites and provides a wide range of outstanding support to your families, other schools and pupils still in their mainstream schools. This results in all of you involved in the centre achieving well when you return to school.

Yours sincerely

Ronald Hall
Lead inspector

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