

Northumberland Pupil Referral Unit

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	132130
Local authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	381446
Inspection dates	7–8 March 2012
Lead inspector	Marian Thomas

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	7–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	24
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Richard Bishopp
Headteacher	Tom Dexter
Date of previous school inspection	21 October 2008
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Introduction

Inspection team

Marian Thomas

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspector observed 12 lessons and parts of lessons taught by five teachers and higher-level teaching assistants. Meetings were held with groups of pupils, the management committee, the local authority and members of the school staff. 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 the school's development planning, examples of pupils' work, and health and safety documentation. The inspector also took into account the views of 14 parents and carers who returned questionnaires to the inspection team.

Information about the school

This is the only pupil referral unit in Northumberland. Currently, pupils range in age from seven to 14 (Year 3 to Year 9). A very much higher proportion than average has special educational needs. About one third of pupils are permanently excluded from their mainstream school. Others are dual registered at the unit and at their mainstream school. The main aim of the unit is to enable pupils to return to mainstream education, or on to other suitable provision, as soon as possible. The unit plays a contributory role in assessment of some pupils for a statement of special educational needs. All pupils are of White British heritage and there are far fewer girls than boys on roll. A much higher proportion of pupils than average are known to be eligible for free school meals and one pupil is currently in the care of the local authority.

The unit also offers support to pupils who are at risk of permanent exclusion. A new six place primary unit has recently been developed which meets the needs of pupils from Year 3 to Year 6.

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	2
Leadership and management	2

Key Findings

- Northumberland Pupil Referral Unit is a good short-stay school. It is not yet an outstanding school because there are still some inconsistencies, including in the quality of teaching. The complex behavioural needs of learners are skilfully met and pupils make good progress academically. A highly caring ethos coupled with good provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development enables pupils to make good gains in their personal development.
- The majority of pupils achieve well. However, whilst pupils make good and sometimes accelerated progress in mathematics and reading, they make less progress in writing. This is because pupils are currently given too few opportunities to extend their writing skills. Tracking systems are not always used effectively to monitor their progress in writing or to inform lesson planning.
- Behaviour is typically good and the majority of pupils have a good understanding of how to keep safe. Pupils respond well to the consistent approach of all staff and the effective reward system. This results in a calm and harmonious environment as evidenced by the continuing reduction in recorded incidents of difficult behaviour.
- Overall good teaching is based on an accurate understanding of the curriculum and effective use of assessment information to plan lessons by the majority of teachers. However, in a small number of lessons learning does not match the needs of pupils well and progress slows. Teaching assistants provide skilled support in lessons.
- Leadership and management are good and continue to improve. The effective leadership of teaching and management of staff and pupils' performance are key to their success. The school is a cohesive community where all are valued. Overall, parents and carers are very pleased with the provision made for their children.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve pupils' achievement in writing, especially in upper Key Stage 3 by:
 - increasing opportunities for pupils to undertake writing activities across the curriculum
 - improving the way in which pupils' progress in writing is tracked and monitored.
- Improve the consistency in the quality of teaching to that of the best by improving teachers' use of assessment information to plan learning more effectively in a small number of lessons

Main Report

Achievement of pupils

Inspection findings endorse the views of parents and carers that their children are making good progress. Most pupils attend the school for a short period of time. The majority are working at levels lower than those expected for their age. This is because of gaps in their learning, often due to their complex emotional and behavioural difficulties. Added to this, some have additional needs, such as moderate learning difficulties. Once they settle into the nurturing and supportive environment of the school, barriers to learning are minimised and all groups make equally good progress. This represents good achievement overall and many pupils leave with broadly average attainment. The majority of pupils are successful in making good and often accelerated progress in reading and mathematics due to highly individualised programmes of work which are closely tailored to the needs of individual pupils and boost their progress significantly. However, pupils, particularly those in upper Key Stage 3, make less progress in writing. This is because there are currently insufficient opportunities in lessons for them to practise and improve their writing skills. In the majority of lessons, pupils show good attitudes to learning because teaching staff have high expectations and individual learning programmes meet their needs well. Pupils respond particularly well to the effectively targeted intervention programmes that support their good progress in reading and mathematics. For example, in one session the majority of pupils were working closely with a teaching assistant cooperatively constructing a model of the Titanic. Pupils worked individually and in pairs on a programme designed to improve their reading skills. Pupils' attitudes to learning throughout the lesson were excellent. They all applied themselves to the tasks with great enthusiasm, helping each other and showing a great willingness to persevere. Their pleasure and pride in their achievements in learning to read were obvious. Because many make accelerated progress many of those who attend in Year 6 leave with close to average attainment in reading.

Pupils join the school at different points in their school career, often midway through a term. Despite this the majority settle quickly and this, combined with the high level of personal challenge within the exciting and varied curriculum, contributes to pupils' good spiritual, moral and social development and their successful transfer back to main school education.

Quality of teaching

Overall teaching is good. The assessment of pupils' needs in the majority of classrooms is rigorous and informs planning for learning well. However there are some inconsistencies in teachers' use of assessment information in a small number of lessons. In these lessons, teachers fail to plan for the needs of all pupils and, because assessment is not used effectively, learning and achievement slows. Good teaching could clearly be seen in a very well-organised mathematics lesson, in which pupils in a mixed-age Key Stage 3 class were working on their individual programmes. The calm and industrious atmosphere in the classroom was clearly linked to the pupils' obvious enjoyment of the task and the strength of their relationships with staff. The wide span of ability was effectively managed by the teacher who frequently referred pupils to their target levels, giving continuous encouragement of how to achieve, and in one case, exceed these targets. As a result all pupils made good or better progress.

Reading and mathematical activities are appropriately planned and much effort is made to develop pupils' communication skills at all levels. The majority of teachers plan lessons conscientiously and have high expectations of what pupils can achieve. The curriculum overall is well organised and personalised to meet the needs of learners. Enrichment activities, for example, weekly trips away from the classroom, are particularly effective at re-engaging the most disaffected and improving pupils' cultural awareness. Teaching assistants' time is planned effectively and pupils throughout the school are well supported with learning time maximised. Teaching also has a positive impact on the development of pupils' cultural awareness, for example, through visits and the celebration of festivals and events from cultures other than pupils' own. This contributes well to furthering pupils' understanding of other communities and has contributed to their good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

The majority of classrooms are organised well with vibrant art displays contributing to learning. The management of pupils' complex social, emotional and behavioural needs is good and, as a result, pupils show good attitudes to learning. All parents and carers who responded to the inspection questionnaire agreed with the inspection findings and felt teaching was good. A comment made by one sums up the views of the majority, 'Since coming to this school I have seen a 100% improvement in my child's behaviour, attitude and self-confidence.'

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The majority of parents and carers feel that pupils' behaviour at school is good and that they are kept safe. The inspector found the behaviour of pupils to be good, despite their high level of behavioural and emotional needs, with few interruptions to learning. Pupils say behaviour is good for the majority of the time and they are well aware of what to do if they encounter difficulties with others. This tolerant and empathetic approach helps staff to reduce interruptions to learning in the classroom and is clear evidence of pupils' good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. There have been few exclusions since the last inspection. Through taking part in school visits, and personal, social and health education, pupils are well prepared for re-integration back into school. Pupils say they feel safe in school and the majority are developing a good understanding of right and wrong, of different types of bullying and of the needs of others. Pupils say that instances of bullying occasionally happen, but are dealt with quickly and effectively by staff. Pupils' attendance is good and continues to improve year-on-year. Currently, attendance is higher than that of

the average for a mainstream secondary school, largely because pupils enjoy their time at school, often for the first time in their school careers. Pupils in the nurture group summed up pupils' views overall: when asked what the school could do to improve, suggested, 'Stay open longer.'

Leadership and management

Despite some recent turbulence in the senior leadership team, the headteacher and acting deputy headteacher have moved the school forward significantly since the last inspection. This, coupled with effective partnerships developed with outside organisations, is driving improvement further. Systems used to track pupils' progress and set targets for learning have been improved significantly since the last inspection. Self-evaluation is accurate and staff are clear about what is needed to raise pupils' attainment further. This demonstrates clearly the school's good capacity to improve further. Professional training for teachers, support and administration staff is used effectively to raise pupils' attainment, the quality of teaching and to improve management.

Members of the governing body have good skills, knowledge and understanding and are highly supportive of senior leaders. Through their frequent visits to school they have developed a good understanding of the day-to-day running of the school and offer a good level of support and challenge to senior leaders. Leaders, managers and the management committee ensure policies and procedures for safeguarding are in place and that practice is of a good standard. Risk assessments are undertaken regularly and are recorded effectively. The senior leadership team and staff have ensured that the school is a highly inclusive community. Systems to promote equality of opportunity and tackle discrimination within the school are good and, as a result, successfully eliminate any gaps in the performance of the majority of groups of pupils.

The curriculum is good and is matched well to pupils' needs. The recent focus on reading and numeracy has seen an upward trend in attainment. A myriad of enrichment activities have contributed successfully to the school's good provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Leaders have built highly successful partnerships with a range of organisations which benefit pupils. For example, regular trips to local museums and places of worship increase pupils' confidence and social skills. Strong links with the local community help to develop pupils' understanding and respect for other communities. The school is successful at engaging parents and carers, they are kept well informed about their children's progress and the majority are highly supportive of the work of the school.

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.
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.



9 March 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Northumberland Pupil Referral Unit, Morpeth NE61 6NF

Thank you very much for making me feel so welcome when I inspected your school. I really enjoyed meeting you all. It was good to hear how much you value your school and how much you enjoy lessons. I want to say 'thank you' to those of you who gave up your time to talk to me, particularly at lunch time, and told me how much you enjoy school. I agree with those of you who told me that you think your school is good. These are just some of the things I particularly enjoyed:

- the very friendly and polite welcome you all give to visitors
- the way in which staff care for you and help you to make progress towards returning to your mainstream schools
- the way in which you are often caring and helpful towards each other and enjoy working together
- the hard work you put into learning and overcoming your problems.

I have asked staff to do these things to improve your school even more and I hope you will help them by working hard:

- give you more opportunities to practise your writing skills
- make sure your progress in writing is tracked and monitored so you and your teachers know what you need to do to improve
- ensure the work teachers plan for you helps all of you to learn equally well.

I wish you all the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Marian Thomas
Lead inspector

