

Children's Support Centre - Colchester

Inspection report

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|--------------------------------|--------------------|
| Unique Reference Number | 132850 |
| Local Authority | Essex |
| Inspection number | 360453 |
| Inspection dates | 9–10 December 2010 |
| Reporting inspector | Sue Aldridge |

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

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| Type of school | Pupil referral unit |
| School category | Pupil referral unit |
| Age range of pupils | 11–16 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 101 |
| Appropriate authority | The local authority |
| Headteacher | Gillian Lock-Bowen (Head of Quadrant) |
| Date of previous school inspection | 5 November 2007 |
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors, who observed 12 lessons or parts of lessons, three of which were joint observations. Altogether, 12 different teachers were observed. Meetings were held with the headteacher, a representative of the local authority, members of the management committee, staff and students. Inspectors observed the centre's work and looked at a wide range of documents including students' personal plans, teachers' planning, records, tracking information and reports. Completed questionnaires from three parents and carers, 37 students and 30 staff were analysed.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following.

How quickly does the centre improve the learning and rate of academic progress of students?

How well do students improve their attitudes, behaviour, confidence and relationships during their time at the centre?

Are students effectively reintegrated into mainstream schools so that they sustain improvements and are academically successful?

How effectively are leaders at all levels involved in the processes of monitoring and evaluation?

Information about the school

The centre was formed in September 2009 from the merger of the local authority's Behaviour Support Service and Integrated Support Service in the north east quadrant of Essex. In September 2010, the centre absorbed the Home Education Service for the area. The reorganisation is ongoing, with some staff on temporary contracts. The aims of the centre are to meet the needs of students within the local behaviour and attendance partnerships, build capacity within mainstream schools and narrow the gap in learning for all vulnerable children.

The centre incorporates three sites, two in Colchester and one in Clacton-on-Sea. Students are organised into four learning communities across the three sites, each serving a distinct group of students. Students include those at risk of exclusion, those who have been permanently excluded from mainstream schools, and those with medical needs. About a fifth of the students have been permanently excluded and are on the roll of the centre; others are registered both at their own schools and at the centre. A higher than average proportion of students are known to be eligible for free school meals. Most students are of White British heritage. A third of the students have a statement of special educational needs describing their behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. Students arrive at and leave the centre at various points between Years 7 and 11.

The centre has recently been awarded National Healthy School status.

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: how good is the school?**3****The school's capacity for sustained improvement****3**

Main findings

The Children's Support Centre is a satisfactory pupil referral unit. It meets its aims satisfactorily, and in the last academic year almost a third of its students returned to mainstream schools. Parents and carers are very positive about what the centre provides, and staff work hard to involve them in students' learning. For example, courses are provided for parents and carers of students at the centre as well as those in mainstream schools, and parents and carers have regular and frequent opportunities to discuss students' progress and next steps in life.

While at the centre, students' improved attitudes and behaviour most often help them to re-engage in learning and they make satisfactory academic progress. This is the result of satisfactory teaching and a sound curriculum. There are several strengths within these aspects but also some weaknesses; the centre's leaders know where these lie and have a suitable strategy for improving the provision. Good practice in teaching is not yet consistent across all lessons. For instance, lessons do not always provide sufficient challenge throughout and staff occasionally expect too little of their students. Although staff are provided with a good range of information about students in addition to their attainment levels, they do not always plan a wide enough range of teaching approaches to take account of the ways in which students prefer to learn, and independent learning is not consistently encouraged. Information and communication technology (ICT) is not used routinely as an aid to teaching and learning, and students do not have enough planned opportunities to consolidate their other basic skills across different subjects. Staff routinely review students' attitudes and behaviour at the end of a lesson but do not consistently link this to the review of learning.

There is a satisfactory range of accreditation for students of all abilities, and the centre is developing the range; there is no qualification yet available for the most able students in ICT. Pastoral care is a strong feature and students feel well supported; staff listen to students, who are thus able to influence developments. Staff are generally skilled in managing students' behaviour. They do not all have up-to-date training in positive handling techniques, but this does not compromise students' safety as instances of particularly challenging behaviour are rare. Attendance is low, often because of students' medical needs, but it is improving securely and staff take every opportunity to encourage good attendance.

The centre's capacity to improve is satisfactory. As a relatively young institution in the midst of a significant reorganisation, the centre is being supported well by the local authority. Its management committee is a strong group, which plays an important role in both supporting and challenging the leadership. The headteacher's very clear vision for the role of the centre is articulated in its improvement plan, and evident in improvements that are already taking place. Self-evaluation is broadly accurate. Not all staff have the

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skills to use the wealth of data gathered on the performance of individuals to evaluate the work of the centre as a whole. Staff know a lot about how well individual students are doing, but carry out little analysis on the performance of different groups. Also, the centre does not gather precise information about how well students do on their return to mainstream schools, in order to evaluate the longer-term effectiveness of the process. The centre is currently implementing computer software to make tracking of students' progress and the analysis of the performance of different groups more efficient.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen the centre's provision by ensuring that all staff:
 - ensure that consistently high expectations are reflected in challenging tasks in lessons
 - use a wide range of approaches to engage students, including the use of ICT to support teaching and as an independent learning tool
 - include opportunities for students to practise and learn literacy, numeracy and ICT skills in all subjects
 - ensure that all students review their learning as well as their behaviour and attitudes during lessons
 - provide a wider range of accreditation to suit students of all abilities, especially in ICT
 - are suitably trained in positive handling techniques.
- Increase the centre's capacity to improve by ensuring that:
 - it completes implementation of plans to use ICT to track students' progress and analyse the performance of different groups
 - all available data are analysed to gauge the effectiveness of the provision on outcomes for students
 - all leaders have the skills they need to make effective use of data in self-evaluation.
- Up to 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Students enter the centre with standards that are broadly average, although a few have lost ground because of frequent absences from school. In the lessons seen during the inspection, most students were working at levels close to those expected for their age. The centre is successfully increasing the proportion of students who attain GCSE passes at A* to C grades, particularly in art. Students' art work on display in the centre testifies to high standards in this subject. All groups of students make satisfactory progress given the length of their stay at the centre, so their achievement is satisfactory. Most absences are for medical reasons. Students are supported in catching up with work they have missed, so the achievement of those with medical conditions is also satisfactory. In lessons,

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learning and progress are best when students are interested in the topics and tasks appeal to them. For instance, in an English lesson, students engaged well in discussion about characters' different 'motives for murder' and built up a 'mind-map' which provided them with a good framework on which to base their written work. Similarly, they deepen their understanding when they rise to challenges presented, such as tackling a higher-level task in science. Occasionally they persevere to improve work, such as in art. However, they make less progress when tasks lack appeal or challenge, and occasionally they opt out of tasks or do not complete them to the best of their ability.

Students grow in self-confidence and self-esteem because staff are quick to recognise and celebrate successes. The centre's rules are well known, although students do not always adhere to them. They appreciate the points and rewards system and are usually very honest in their evaluation of their attitudes and behaviour in lessons. They know a good deal about how to maintain a healthy lifestyle, encouraged by the strong provision acknowledged through the centre's award, but do not consistently make healthy choices at the centre. Most say that they enjoy coming to the centre, and a few prefer the environment to that of their mainstream schools because it is smaller and they feel more secure. Most feel safe, although there are occasional instances of bullying, particularly verbal abuse, despite close supervision of students. Staff are quick to challenge and put a stop to this. Students improve their ability to manage their anger and make secure improvements in their behaviour because they are motivated well by the centre's points system. They contribute well to each centre's community, but initiatives to get them involved in the wider community are at an early stage. Nonetheless, they raise funds for national and international charities and develop a sound understanding of other faiths and cultures. Students report that racism is rare, and each community is cohesive. Satisfactory academic achievement, work experience, vocational tasters, careers education and team-building activities combine to prepare students adequately for the next step in life. The centre is successfully reducing the proportion of students who leave without going on to further education, employment or training.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

| | |
|---|----------|
| Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning | 3 |
| Taking into account: | |
| Pupils' attainment ¹ | 3 |
| The quality of pupils' learning and their progress | 3 |
| The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress | 3 |
| The extent to which pupils feel safe | 3 |
| Pupils' behaviour | 3 |
| The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles | 3 |
| The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community | 3 |
| The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being | 3 |
| Taking into account: | |
| Pupils' attendance ¹ | 4 |
| The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development | 3 |

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

How effective is the provision?

Staff build good working relationships with students and this helps to create a suitable climate for learning. Assessment information is generally used well to plan tasks that help students move on in their learning, although there are occasions when tasks keep students occupied so that they are productive but do not increase their knowledge, skills or understanding. Class sizes are small and so there is plenty of support for students, but occasionally this makes them overly reliant on adult support as lessons do not regularly include opportunities for independent learning. On occasions, teaching assistants model well by becoming learners themselves in small groups, and showing students how they are expected to respond in discussions. This works well. Learning objectives are shared with students and generally reviewed later in the lesson, but this is not usually carried out alongside the review of attitudes and behaviour, so students do not always see the link between these aspects of learning.

Staff have worked hard to develop a range of learning experiences in each community that reflects the specific needs of each group. For instance, good account is taken of the needs described on students' statements, and additional programmes such as anger management are provided as appropriate. A positive feature is the way that the interests and wishes of students are taken into account when planning curriculum content. The centre has no teacher with particular expertise in ICT, and the local authority is supporting staff in developing their skills in this subject as well as others. A current development, still

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at an early stage, is to ensure that all subjects encourage the use of ICT, literacy and numeracy skills, so these opportunities are being incorporated into planning for all subjects.

The centre has effective strategies for encouraging attendance and improvements in behaviour. Arrangements for keeping students safe are sound. Additional staffing, in the form of home school liaison workers or mental health professionals, for example, is effective in supporting students' personal development. Students whose circumstances make them particularly vulnerable are given the support that they need, and external agencies are involved as necessary. Leaders have appropriate plans to update training for all staff in positive handling techniques.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

| | |
|--|----------|
| The quality of teaching | 3 |
| Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning | 3 |
| The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships | 3 |
| The effectiveness of care, guidance and support | 3 |

How effective are leadership and management?

Despite the enormous amount of change that there has been since the centre was established in its current form, staff morale is high. Almost all show a strong commitment to realising the new vision for the centre's future and follow the strong strategic lead provided by the local authority, the headteacher and the management committee. Having seen the data for the local area on students who leave without employment, education or training placements, the management committee initiated a project to identify students in the centre at risk of this and set up programmes during the summer holidays to tackle the problem, in partnership with community groups. These had the desired impact, and few students left without a placement for September. Members of the management committee visit frequently to check on aspects of its work such as safeguarding, and there is now a full complement of members, including parental representation.

Despite these considerable strengths, and wide involvement of staff in monitoring and evaluation activities, not all those with leadership responsibilities have the skills needed to make effective use of data to evaluate the centre's work, and this means that leadership and management are satisfactory rather than good.

There is a clear commitment to equality of opportunity, and individuals and their particular circumstances are very well known. Students' progress is carefully tracked and regularly reviewed. Where students are not on track to achieve the challenging targets set for them, intervention is swift and well targeted. However, the manual tracking system is time-consuming, and a transfer to an electronic system is almost complete. Where this is already in use, it provides a more efficient method of tracking progress and analysing the performance of different groups.

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Arrangements for keeping students safe are satisfactory. Appropriate procedures and practices for child protection and the safe recruitment of staff meet requirements. Through the curriculum, students learn effectively about how to maintain their personal safety.

The centre has audited its provision for promoting community cohesion and identified a suitable set of actions to enhance what it currently provides. Increasing the opportunities for students to learn about cultural diversity has been a recent focus for development, but the impact of this has not yet been evaluated.

These are the grades for leadership and management

| | |
|--|----------|
| The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement | 3 |
| Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning | 3 |
| The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met | 2 |
| The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers | 2 |
| The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being | 3 |
| The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination | 3 |
| The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures | 3 |
| The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion | 3 |
| The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money | 3 |

Views of parents and carers

The return of completed parental questionnaires was very low for a pupil referral unit. Inspectors also took account of a recent survey of parental views carried out by the centre, which used a similar questionnaire but did not seek views on how effectively the centre deals with unacceptable behaviour or preparation for the future. Inspectors found that almost all parents and carers are strongly positive about what the centre provides for its students. The comments they added to questionnaires show that, in general, they find that the centre is instrumental in 'turning students around' and giving them a better chance of success in later life than they had before arriving at the centre. They identify small classes and the individual support given to students as key factors in its success. They agree that parents and carers are kept well informed about students' progress, as they have good opportunities to be involved in regular and frequent reviews. Inspection findings show that these are strong features of the provision.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of students registered at Children's Support Centre - Colchester to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received three completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 101 students registered at the school.

| Statements | Strongly agree | | Agree | | Disagree | | Strongly disagree | |
|---|----------------|----|-------|-----|----------|----|-------------------|---|
| | Total | % | Total | % | Total | % | Total | % |
| My child enjoys school | 0 | 0 | 2 | 67 | 1 | 33 | 0 | 0 |
| The school keeps my child safe | 0 | 0 | 3 | 100 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| My school informs me about my child's progress | 0 | 0 | 3 | 100 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| My child is making enough progress at this school | 1 | 33 | 2 | 67 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| The teaching is good at this school | 0 | 0 | 3 | 100 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| The school helps me to support my child's learning | 1 | 33 | 2 | 67 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle | 0 | 0 | 3 | 100 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment) | 0 | 0 | 3 | 100 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| The school meets my child's particular needs | 1 | 33 | 2 | 67 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour | 2 | 67 | 1 | 33 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns | 1 | 33 | 2 | 67 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| The school is led and managed effectively | 2 | 67 | 1 | 33 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school | 1 | 33 | 2 | 67 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

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

| | Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools) | | | |
|----------------------|---|------|--------------|------------|
| Type of school | Outstanding | Good | Satisfactory | Inadequate |
| Nursery schools | 58 | 36 | 4 | 2 |
| Primary schools | 8 | 43 | 40 | 9 |
| Secondary schools | 10 | 35 | 42 | 13 |
| Sixth forms | 13 | 39 | 45 | 3 |
| Special schools | 33 | 42 | 20 | 4 |
| Pupil referral units | 18 | 40 | 29 | 12 |
| All schools | 11 | 42 | 38 | 9 |

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

| | |
|----------------------------|---|
| Achievement: | the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training. |
| Attainment: | the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons. |
| Capacity to improve: | the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on 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 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: | <p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement. ■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils. ■ The quality of teaching. ■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships. ■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support. |
| 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. |

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.



13 December 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Children's Support Centre - Colchester, Colchester, CO6 1LG

Thank you for making us welcome at your centres when we visited recently. We enjoyed seeing you at work and talking to groups of you about your views. We appreciated your help.

We judge that your centre is satisfactory overall. You are making satisfactory progress. Most of you are working at the levels expected at your ages, so your achievement is satisfactory. The majority of you say that you enjoy coming to the centre. Most other aspects are satisfactory, such as your behaviour and the extent to which you feel safe, lead healthy lifestyles and contribute to life in the community. We were pleased to hear that staff listen to you and that you are able to influence what happens at each centre. You are adequately prepared for the next step in life, whether this is a return to your schools or a move on to further education, training or work. Although attendance is low, much of this is because of not being fit enough to come to the centre. A strong feature is that your parents and carers are positive about what the centre does to help improve your chances in life.

We have identified two main things that need to be improved and you can read about these in the full report. First, the teaching needs to be good or better in more lessons. For example, you need to be given work that challenges you and encourages you to be more independent in your learning. Staff are going to use ICT more frequently to help them teach and you learn. Second, staff are going to make better use of all the statistical information they have to evaluate how well the centre is doing and make sure that all of you do equally well.

You can contribute to improvement by attending as often as you possibly can, and always doing your best in lessons. We wish you well in the future.

Yours sincerely

Sue Aldridge

Lead inspector

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