

The Links College South

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	131182
Local Authority	West Sussex
Inspection number	360223
Inspection dates	15–16 February 2011
Reporting inspector	David Marshall

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	184
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	n/a
Headteacher	Julia Vincent
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. Twenty-three lessons and 18 different teachers were observed. Discussions were held with the consultant headteacher, advanced skills teacher, teaching, support and administrative staff, managers, and pupils. The college's documentation was scrutinised carefully and included improvement plans, the tracking of pupils' progress, staff and management meeting records and safeguarding documentation. In addition, questionnaires from 16 parents and carers, and others from staff and pupils were analysed.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the college's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- The effectiveness of the college's assessment and tracking procedures and how well they are used in planning for individual pupils' needs.
- The impact of the college's provision on pupils' personal development in enhancing their ability to become independent and take responsibility for themselves and their own work.
- How well the curriculum and additional activities meet individual pupils' needs and contribute to their overall outcomes.
- In the light of the changes to the Links organisation since the last inspection, how successfully the leaders and managers at all levels are now enabling continuity and improvement.

Information about the school

Referral Service consisting of seven centres with additional provision through the Key Stage 4 Engagement programme, individual tuition and an e-learning service. One of these centres is currently closed. A consultant headteacher leads the service overall, with each centre having its own head and staff. All pupils who receive provision within The Links College South have behavioural difficulties, are emotionally vulnerable or have complex medical needs. For most pupils there is a high level of multi-agency involvement. The large majority of pupils in The Links College South are boys. The large majority of pupils entering the college are White British. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free college meals is above the national average.

Currently the majority of referrals to The Links College South are in Key Stages 3 and 4. Much of The Links College South accommodation has been rebuilt, or refurbished, recently. The Willows Tuition Centre, Lancing, moved into refurbished accommodation at Freshbrook, Lancing in February 2010. A new Worthing pupil referral unit (PRU) is being built on the site of Northbrook Further Education College. It is due to open in September 2011.

The Links College South is governed by a management committee comprising of members of the county council, community partners, agencies, parents, carers and staff.

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?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

The Links College South is an outstanding pupil referral service that is highly effective in meeting the complex and diverse needs of its pupils. The college's success is due to the outstanding knowledge, understanding and efficiency of the management, the high quality of care provided and the excellent relationships with all agencies involved. The consultant headteacher, advanced skills teacher, heads of centre and management committee provide highly effective leadership. They know the college's strengths very well and what needs to be refined further. Over the last two years, their track record of galvanising all staff and carefully, continuously and swiftly improving their provision to meet the needs of all pupils shows that the college has an excellent capacity for sustained improvement.

On entry to the centres, the vast majority of pupils are disaffected with their education and have lost interest in their learning. This new, pioneering and innovative provision successfully re-engages them with learning and rebuilds their confidence and self-esteem, to the extent that the majority achieve well enough to return to mainstream schools or go on to study meaningful courses at colleges of further education. This is a remarkable achievement. The parents and carers of these pupils are delighted. As one wrote, 'Due to this college and the staff, I have my daughter back!'

The most obvious and affecting aspect of the college, that visitors rightly recognise, is the dedication and commitment of all staff, at all times. Through their consistent working practices, staff promote their belief that each pupil is unique and a valued individual with the right for respect and a positive self-image. The pupils' individual profiles and records seen actively support this commitment and show just how successful they are being. Teaching is never less than good and, in most instances, is outstanding. The college has developed an exemplary use of a range of assessment data so that the pupils' progress, across a variety of complex needs, can be systematically demonstrated. As a result, any modifications for their needs are made instantly and effectively. This has been accomplished so successfully that pupils are moving forward rapidly in all subjects. Owing to the short-term nature of the education provided, few pupils sit GCSEs or other examinations while at the college. College data show that many pupils acquire skills and knowledge in line with those expected for their age, often from a low start.

The provision is remarkably successful in supporting pupils with their emotional and mental health difficulties. As a result, their behaviour is outstanding. As one pupil observed, 'It is easy to do the right thing here as they (the staff) all respect us, and so we respect them.' The college has a strong emphasis on the implementation of thorough and practical behaviour plans. Given the number of medical conditions some pupils have, their attendance overall is above average.

The outstanding leadership team's latest, carefully planned initiative is to promote individual teachers to the role of lead learners. These members of staff take responsibility

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for instigating, recording and modifying certain, mutually agreed developments across the whole of the provision. The first of these, the coaching initiative, is very successful. The leadership team is aware that to consolidate their successes and build on what they have already achieved, these lead learner plans have now to be fully embedded.

The centres' careful audits of community cohesion clearly illustrate how much they achieve in preparing pupils for the outside world. While links with the different local communities are excellent, pupils' awareness of, and preparation for, living and working in a culturally diverse United Kingdom are still being developed in the planning of the curriculum.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that, by July 2012, the changes in the management structure known as lead learners are embedded so all members of staff are able to make the maximum contribution to the provision of the different centres.
- Enhance pupils' cultural understanding, especially of their place in a culturally diverse United Kingdom, by:
 - drawing together and instigating the findings of the analysis of the college's context
 - putting into practice the planned modifications of the curriculum.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

Although there are variations, often due to their earlier non-attendance, pupils generally join the different centres with attainment that is well below average. Thanks to the immediate and very careful early assessments, all groups of pupils begin to achieve exceptionally well. Observations of lessons during the inspection confirmed that, throughout the different centres, all groups of pupils make excellent progress. It was impressive to observe, in all lessons, impeccable behaviour and the excellent skills pupils acquire in working independently or with their classmates. This helps to create the high quality climate for learning that was evident in all classes.

In all lessons observed pupils were enabled to consolidate and build on their previous learning. On all occasions, this was done in an enjoyable, but challenging, atmosphere. The art lessons seen showed that the multi-disciplinary approach adopted helped pupils appreciate and thrive in their learning. As one pupil said, 'This is the first place I have been to that understands how I learn.'

Pupils talk positively about how well they are doing and clearly appreciate the support they get. There is a great deal of enthusiasm for all activities, especially the art and sporting activities in which they are all involved. Pupils are very clear about the importance of keeping fit and have an excellent awareness of healthy foods. They are very positive about the quality of the college meals. The way in which the pupils cooked and served the healthy meals at the Littlehampton centre was particularly impressive.

Pupils have a very clear understanding of what is right and wrong and, through the effective systems within college, learn to improve their behaviour, which is of a very high standard. As one pupil recalled, new pupils struggle to conform but the college's rewards system and keen participation in the activities 'changes people straight away'. Pupils recognise that there are problems sometimes but they are clear about who they should go

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to and are confident that staff will address any issues they may have. Links with the different local communities are strong. The vast majority of pupils, by the time they are ready to re-integrate into mainstream schools, are responsible young adults who have developed good skills that will support them well in the world of work and college.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	1
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	1
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

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?

Observations of teaching confirmed that throughout the different centres, pupils make excellent progress regardless of their starting points because of the highly effective approach adopted by teachers. Curriculum planning is exceptionally helpful to staff in that it links very closely to assessment criteria so it is very clear what steps each pupil needs to take next. This assessment is of exceptionally high quality, both in its accuracy and regularity. Completely individual lesson plans are constantly being adapted to take account of the stages at which individual pupils are working. The excellent use of e-learning means that pupils are constantly able to be in touch and learning despite the many difficulties they may face. The provision of home tuition is as thorough and effective as the rest of the provision.

Consistently high expectations of behaviour and academic progress ensure that pupils continually strive to do their very best. In all lessons, work is especially well planned, with highly skilled teaching assistants supporting learning exceptionally well. This was typified in an English lesson where the teaching assistant helped all pupils to reach the expected

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conclusion of writing a witches' spell in Macbeth, and joined in the sharing of ideas at the end.

Throughout the college, there are very positive relationships between staff and pupils, which contribute to the supportive ethos for study. The impact of the college's outstanding support, guidance and care is evident in the pupils' excellent standards of behaviour and in their exceptionally strong spiritual, moral and social development.

If there is one aspect of their work that is particularly impressive it is that of the inclusion manager and her team. This initiative, brought in by the consultant headteacher, works across the whole of the six centres and is focused on those pupils in mainstream schools at risk of exclusion (AROE). The team's relationships with over 60 schools and colleges is exemplary and records show they have successfully intervened on many occasions to defuse potential crises and enable pupils to have a break from their schools prior to successful reintegration.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	1
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	1
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The college's success in providing excellent equality of opportunity for each pupil is due to outstanding leadership and management and high quality teamwork. The way that the provision has been restructured over the last two years has been exceptional. Thanks to the example of the consultant headteacher and the senior team, all staff have a shared vision for how the college can best provide for its pupils together with the strong commitment to achieve this. Excellent monitoring and support for teaching, such as the excellent coaching scheme carefully introduced last year, has meant that all staff swiftly adjusted to the college's systems and procedures.

Each centre knows itself very well and its evaluation of its work is honest and accurate. The outstanding management committee is fully involved in this process, challenging decisions and requesting explanations where necessary. It holds the overall provision to account in a challenging but supportive manner.

Excellent attention is paid by managers at all levels to ensure the highest quality of safety and care for the pupils. Pupils' safety and well-being are paramount at all times, ensuring that the centres are very safe and supportive places. Pupils are further protected by rigorous staff recruitment and selection procedures, which show a careful vetting and a robust selection process undertaken. The senior managers, supported well by all staff, are effective in promoting equality of opportunity and tackling discrimination for all pupils across all aspects of each centres work, as seen in all groups of pupils, especially those

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most vulnerable, making outstanding progress and re-engaging with their education. The contribution that the centre's make to community cohesion is good. The management team is in the process of implementing plans for greater national links in order to raise this aspect of community cohesion and cultural understanding to the outstanding level of the rest of its provision.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	1
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Views of parents and carers

The overwhelming majority of the small proportion of parents and carers who returned the questionnaires are very happy with the centres and the provision their children are receiving. They consider that each centre has a dedicated team of staff and the headteacher leads and manages the provision exceptionally well. They agree that the college has a very warm, supportive and friendly atmosphere and that their children make outstanding progress. Inspectors fully endorse these views. The very small number of constructive concerns, for example about exercise and the pupils' access to learning about healthy lifestyles, were followed up during the inspection as part of the general gathering of evidence, and discussed with the consultant headteacher.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at The Links College South to complete a questionnaire about their views of the college.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the college.

The inspection team received 16 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 184 pupils registered at the college.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	5	31	6	38	2	13	1	6
The school keeps my child safe	9	56	7	44	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	8	50	8	50	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	6	38	9	56	1	6	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	5	31	9	56	1	6	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	5	31	11	69	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	3	19	9	56	3	19	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)	4	25	8	50	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	7	44	6	38	1	6	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	5	31	9	56	1	6	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	6	38	10	63	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	8	50	8	50	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	8	50	8	50	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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

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 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 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.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

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.



17 February 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of The Links College South, Littlehampton BN17 6AW

I am writing to thank you all for making us so welcome when we came to the college recently. We did enjoy our visit. Yours is an outstanding college with many strengths, and we agree with what you told us ♦ it is a really great place to learn. Here is a list of some of the things that we think are really good.

- The college looks after you extremely carefully and you all make excellent progress.
- You behave brilliantly, get along with each other and feel very safe in college.
- You have very good ideas about how to make things better and you have an excellent understanding of how to live healthily.
- You find lessons interesting and really enjoy college.
- There are plenty of exciting things for you to do, in college, on visits and through the internet.
- The headteacher and staff manage the college extremely well.

Even in excellent colleges, some things can be even better. We want the managers to make sure that the changes in the roles of staff to allow them to bring in and support new initiatives are implemented as soon as possible. We have also asked the teachers to make sure that you are given the chance to look at and understand about how children and adults live in places in the United Kingdom that are different from where you live.

Finally, we would like to thank you once again for all your help. We wish you well in the future.

Yours sincerely

David Marshall
Lead inspector

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