

South West Area Pupil Referral Unit

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	130349
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	360130
Inspection dates	16–17 November 2010
Reporting inspector	Martyn Groucutt

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	46
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Josephine Valentine
Headteacher	Susan Howe
Date of previous school inspection	31 January 2008
School address	Chessbrook Education Support Centre Watford WD18 6LJ
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one additional inspector. A total of nine lessons taught by nine different teachers were observed. Meetings were held with the headteacher and teachers who hold key responsibilities. Discussions were also held with the chair of the management committee, students and parents. The inspector observed the school's work and looked at arrangements for safeguarding, and at

- a range of policy and planning documentation. A total of 21 parent's questionnaires were scrutinised, together with 14 from students and 21 from members of staff.

The inspector reviewed many aspects of the school's work and looked in detail at a number of key areas:

- The effectiveness of individual provision in meeting the needs of students and helping them make academic and social progress.
- The developments in Key Stage 4 provision since the last inspection and their success in improving provision for students.
- The effectiveness of leadership and management in managing and coordinating the wider range of provision that is now in place.

Information about the school

More commonly referred to as Chessbrook Education Support Centre, this pupil referral unit provides full time education for a group of students who have been permanently excluded from school or where the school has requested a managed transfer. In addition, it provides a very large programme of outreach for primary and secondary schools in the area. There is an expectation that students who are admitted to the centre during Key Stage 3 will undertake programmes that will lead to their reintegration into mainstream schools as soon as possible. In Key Stage 4 where reintegration is possible it will be supported, but if it is considered that the student has a better chance of a successful outcome by remaining at the centre this is the preferred option. Since the last inspection the centre has expanded its Key Stage 4 provision and it now offers a much wider curriculum and opportunities for external assessment. Some of this provision comes from a range of external providers under the monitoring and supervision of the centre. The centre has the Healthy Schools award.

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

Chessbrook Education Support Centre is an outstanding centre. Having extended its Key Stage 4 provision it is able to provide personally-tailored courses of study to address the needs of all its students. This enables them to transform their levels of achievement. They arrive at the centre with a history of broken education and sense of frustration because of repeated failure. The central belief among staff at the centre is that their primary role is to re-engage these students with learning and enable them to experience success. A wide ranging curriculum supports different types of external accreditation. The individualised curriculum ensures breadth of coverage, although opportunities to maximise cross-curricular links are not yet fully developed. A very careful induction programme prior to admission helps develop individualised study programmes and, as a result, students make rapid progress culminating in academic success at a variety of levels. While overall attainment is not yet quite at the average, trends over time show improvement and most students gain passes in four GCSE exams, as well as in a range of other exams such as City and Guilds and B.Tec.

Teachers know how well their students are doing because assessment is thorough, although at the moment marking is not always consistent in style and purpose between departments. Staff training on this issue is already being planned. When students leave they virtually all remain in education or training, or enter employment. It is remarkable to see students who could not previously remain in mainstream schools working calmly, behaving impeccably and demonstrating care and consideration to other students and staff. One parent wrote 'This school saved my daughter from herself. Since she has been here she has turned herself round 100%'.

In order to achieve such a remarkable transformation in their lives, the centre demonstrates a total commitment to students' success and is constantly looking for ways in which it can improve provision. The headteacher provides visionary and focussed leadership and is well supported by the extremely dedicated and talented team of faculty leaders and subject coordinators. They have moved the centre forward following its last very successful inspection and because of the excellence of professional practice the capacity to continue this process remains outstanding. The fact that they know themselves so well is reflected in their very effective self-evaluation. Leaders and managers all show total commitment to the transformation of the lives of the students with whom they work, as do all staff in the centre. They engage with students at every opportunity and build extremely strong relationships, providing very positive role models. At the heart of everything lies outstanding care, guidance and support for every student. This promotes outstanding personal development and in order to help address underlying issues it is often extended to parents and carers, since teachers maintain regular weekly contact in order to promote the very positive home links. Parents and carers are extremely positive about the centre. However, a few regular absentees among the small group of full time

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students bring down attendance. For a few, the underlying problems they face make attendance a challenge. However, since the last inspection the centre has worked tirelessly to increase attendance and is able to demonstrate a year on year improvement.

The outreach provided to local primary and secondary schools is also outstanding. Schools are extremely positive about the support they receive and it has supported a big reduction in the number of permanent exclusions. Since the last inspection, the ways in which the success of outreach work and that of external providers of vocational courses is tracked and measured have been greatly improved. Data now provides solid evidence of success whatever the setting.

The centre's Management Committee is very effective. Made up of five local headteachers and three local councillors, they use their expertise to very good effect to ensure that best practice prevails and that the centre remains at the cutting edge of best practice.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Implement a consistent marking policy throughout the centre through:
 - involving staff and the Management Committee in developing a centre policy
 - consistently involving students in the evaluation of their own work and that of fellow students
 - undertaking staff training to ensure consistent implementation of exemplary practice.
- Undertake further curriculum mapping to maximise opportunities for cross-curricular studies.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

The wealth of data available for each student shows that they make very good, often outstanding, progress from very low starting points and overall, achievement is good. Students enter the centre with a history of academic failure, but the excellent support they receive enables them to achieve along a variety of academic pathways. This is because individualised learning programmes enable all to succeed. The belief that learning is an entitlement results in students being set challenging targets and, while attainment is a little below average overall, the progress made by individuals is often outstanding. Many enjoy learning for the first time. Progress in literacy and numeracy is good, although extended writing remains a challenge for some. Practical skills shown in subjects such as art and food technology are often very good enabling students to achieve high standards supported by the expertise of staff. Because individual needs are successfully identified, students with special educational needs and/or disabilities are able to progress at the same rate as others. The inclusive nature of the centre promotes success for all, enabling them to acquire knowledge, develop understanding and practice skills in a variety of settings.

Staff show great expertise in managing the potentially volatile nature of students, who quickly come to realise that they can play a positive role in the centre. Behaviour is outstanding and the openness in relationships creates an environment in which anti-social incidents are not tolerated and students feel very safe and able to learn. A range of opportunities to support the centre and the wider community are encouraged and the

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school council is an effective body in representing student views. Many opportunities exist to promote healthy lifestyles, including communal mealtimes when staff and students mingle in the very pleasant common room. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. This enables students to reflect on their own and other people's experiences and to develop a clear set of personal values.

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	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
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	2
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	3
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?

The teaching observed was good and some was outstanding. Teachers display a range of skills that bring learning to life, including the very effective use of technology. They know their students extremely well and identify specific strategies that engage each one. Planning is detailed, so that in lessons there is pace and challenge. Students respond positively and there is an obvious rapport in classrooms which motivates and engages. Learning support assistants and teachers plan together very carefully so adult support for learning is maximised. The quality of externally provided courses, such as music technology, utilise skills, expertise or technology not available within the centre itself to provide exciting learning activities and support a personalised curriculum that is able to engage all students. Partnerships with local colleges and other providers such as The Prince's Trust are excellent, supporting a wide range of opportunities for students to experience success and gain qualifications.

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Student progress is measured carefully through detailed assessment. However, there is not always consistency in marking across subjects. The very best practice sees students involved in assessing their own work and that of others in the group. However, all assessment is used carefully to enable teachers to maximise challenge and students to celebrate progress and achievement. All students are valued and the care, guidance and support they receive is at the heart of their success. The same is true for the extensive outreach work undertaken in local primary and secondary schools. For some mainstream pupils in receipt of support such as 'Reflect and Relaunch' this involves dual placement courses and the involvement of parents in carefully planned sessions of mutual help and support that includes counselling. The centre works extremely closely with a range of external agencies to sustain the learning and well-being of students who face challenging circumstances.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
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 centre's leaders and managers, under the inspirational leadership of the headteacher, are effectively implementing an ambitious vision for the school. Since the last inspection developments in senior leadership introduced through creating highly effective faculty leaders and enhancing department leadership have seen an increased focus on excellence. This has created a team with high morale and ambitious targets for supporting students' success and aspirations. Outstanding senior practitioners model excellent practice to colleagues. A common belief in the success of the centre permeates at every level. This is equally true of the effective and very well qualified Management Committee members, who provide a good level of support and challenge. They fulfil their duties very effectively. Links with parents and carers are very strong and form tutors are in weekly contact with the homes of students to discuss progress. Parents and carers are closely involved with the planning of student provision wherever they can be engaged. The centre works extremely hard with families to maximise the support they can provide for their children. Wider partnerships are extensive and highly effective in sustaining individual provision, making an excellent contribution to the wide ranging achievements of students.

Safeguarding arrangements are detailed and effective, supporting students who are vulnerable in a variety of ways. All staff are in receipt of appropriate training although not all members of the Management Committee have such a comprehensive understanding. Links with external agencies to support vulnerable students are extremely strong. The intensely inclusive nature of learning in the centre means that the individual student is at the heart of provision, supporting equality of opportunity and facing up to discrimination in whatever form it takes. This is one of the reasons why individuals are empowered to

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achieve such high levels of success. Planning is underway to implement the community audit, although this has not yet been fully completed. However, the centre also stresses its role within the local community in a variety of ways and engages at different levels. On the one hand it sustains education for vulnerable students throughout the area and provides support and advice to schools, but within its own community it also provides for local pensioners to come into the very well-equipped salon for hair dressing students to do their hair.

The excellence of leadership and management and the extremely positive outcomes for individuals and groups of students means that the centre deploys its resources to obtain outstanding value for money.

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	2
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	2
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

A large majority of parents are very supportive of the centre. The inspector looked into issues where some concerns were expressed, but did not find any foundation for them during the inspection. Where parents expressed disagreement, the issues were disparate and did not reflect any consistent issues.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at South West Area Pupil Referral Unit 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 inspector received 21 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 46 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	5	24	13	62	2	9	1	5
The school keeps my child safe	6	29	15	71	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	12	57	9	43	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	8	38	10	48	3	14	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	13	62	6	29	1	5	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	11	52	7	33	3	14	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	7	33	13	62	1	5	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)	8	38	12	57	1	5	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	6	29	11	52	4	19	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	13	62	6	29	2	9	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	9	43	10	48	2	9	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	10	48	10	48	1	4	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	13	63	6	28	2	9	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	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.



18 November 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of South West Area Pupil Referral Unit (Chessbrook Education Support Centre), Watford, WD18 6LJ

I am writing to say how very much I enjoyed my recent visit. It was a pleasure to meet many of you and hear at first hand how much you value and enjoy the centre. It is an outstanding place that is enabling you to be successful and to learn much better than you were able to in the past. Ms Howe and all the staff work really hard to make the centre so successful. There are many adults who have a very clear vision for helping you to turn your lives around and become successful.

One of the things that really impressed me was your personal attitudes. Behaviour is outstanding and you care for each other, so the centre is a safe place where you can learn effectively. The care and support shown by staff helps you to develop your own programmes of study that meet your individual needs. As a result you are able to show good progress from when you first arrive and achieve good outcomes. It is great to see so many students going on to college or employment as a result of having done so well. The centre works really hard to help you do courses you enjoy, sometimes getting good help from outside places such as local colleges. I saw some of you working very well at the Sanctuary recording studio and at the local community centre working with The Prince's Trust. These opportunities really help you to develop your skills and get engaged in learning.

I have asked the centre to look at a couple of things that would make it even better. These are to try to ensure that all marking and assessment of your work is done in a similar way, so you can understand how well you have done and how you can improve further. Also, to look at ways in which different areas of learning can be brought together in the individual lessons you do so you can see links between them.

Keep up your positive attitudes and you will continue to do so well in your outstanding education centre.

Yours sincerely

Martyn Groucutt

Lead inspector

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