

# North Area Pupil Referral Unit (North Herts Education Support Centre)

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	130344
<b>Local Authority</b>	Hertfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	360129
<b>Inspection dates</b>	15–16 March 2011
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Paul Canham

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Pupil referral unit
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	5–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	83
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The local authority
<b>Headteacher</b>	Julie Vernon-Hamilton
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	5 December 2007
<b>School address</b>	The Old Magistrates Court 29 Bancroft, Hitchin Hertfordshire, SG5 1JW
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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors who visited seven lessons and observed seven teachers. The inspectors also held discussions with members of the management committee, staff and representatives of outside agencies, and talked with students. The inspectors observed the centre's work and looked at a range of documentation, including assessment and attendance information, lesson plans, safeguarding arrangements, school development planning, management committee minutes and students' work. Inspectors scrutinised the 14 questionnaires received from parents and carers, as well as those from staff and a sample of students.

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

- The effectiveness of the senior leadership team in managing the complex provision that is based on two sites.
- The extent to which the revised curriculum and individualised programmes are raising levels of achievement and getting students more involved in their learning, while preparing them for a future beyond the centre.
- How far the management committee, while supporting the senior leadership team, is influencing the centre's direction and lifting performance.

## Information about the school

The North Area Pupil Referral Unit is commonly known as the North Herts Education Support Centre (NHESC) and is located on two sites. It provides on-site tuition for students in Years 10 and 11 who have been permanently excluded, or are at risk of permanent exclusion and are jointly registered with their mainstream schools. The centre also provides a reintegration programme for students in Years 1-11 and gives support to 52 primary schools, seven secondary schools and two middle schools. All students have social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and most are of White British heritage. Students have regular access to a range of other professional support services, including the mental health team. A significant proportion of students have not attended their mainstream schools for a considerable period.

Since the last inspection, the on-site provision has been revised and developed into four learning programmes across the two sites. Several staff share their time between the two sites, which are several miles apart. As part of a recent initiative, the provision also caters for the specific needs of children who are cared for in local authority homes.

The management committee is made up of members of the local authority and headteachers from local schools.

The centre has achieved National Healthy Schools status and gained the Connexions Quality mark.

**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 North Herts Education Support Centre is an outstanding pupil referral unit. It achieves its success through the hard work of committed staff under the strong and determined leadership of the headteacher, who is passionate about developing the best provision and gaining the highest outcomes for all students and their families. She is extremely well supported by a very dedicated and skilful team of staff who, collectively, are constantly looking for ways in which they can improve the provision. They have substantially improved the provision since the last inspection and, because of excellent practice and an accurate self-evaluation, the centre has an outstanding capacity to improve. This is reflected in the highly effective systems that are used to monitor the progress of students and the centre's realistic expectations of where it wants the students to be.

One of the exceptionally good features of the setting is the outstanding provision of care, support and guidance. Staff provide an extremely supportive and nurturing environment which places a high priority on enhancing students' self-esteem and in developing their confidence. One student wrote, 'The school has changed my life and set me back on the right path... I will cherish the memories forever.' Parents and carers are very supportive of the centre's work and welcome the influence it is having on their children's attitudes, behaviour and progress.

As a result of high expectations and strong relationships with staff, students learn to manage their behaviour extremely well and their attitudes improve substantially. Students say that they feel very safe and secure in a highly supportive environment and the trust developed between students and staff is at the hub of this success. As a consequence of this and the good teaching, students develop their skills effectively and make up for substantial deficits in their education. Teaching is effective because staff know each student, including their needs and backgrounds, extremely well and use this information to help with planning. However, assessment information is not always used to pitch the questioning of students at an appropriate level. The flexible and wide-ranging curriculum is able to provide personally tailored courses of study to cater for the needs of all students. These courses enable students to raise their levels of achievement and experience success. Underpinned by a comprehensive programme of personal, social and health education (PSHE), students benefit from a very well-constructed personalised learning programme. An inclusion programme is used when students join the centre to identify the type of courses and activities that are most appropriate to their particular needs. As a result, students make good progress in academic and vocational studies at a variety of levels. Trends show improvement and attainment levels that are broadly average for the majority of students in some GCSE subjects as well as in a range of other nationally-recognised qualifications. When students leave, almost all remain in education or training, or enter employment.

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The support given to students in local and primary and secondary schools is outstanding. Schools are extremely positive about the support they receive which has led to a substantial reduction in the number of permanent exclusions.

## **What does the school need to do to improve further?**

- Improve the effectiveness of teaching by ensuring that staff always use the knowledge they have of students to pitch questioning at levels that probe students' understanding and challenge their thinking.

## **Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**

**1**

The centre's unremitting efforts and exceptionally well-informed support are making a substantial difference, resulting in students' good progress from low starting points. Achievement is good. Students typically demonstrate high levels of emotional and/or social needs, which have resulted in lengthy periods of absence from mainstream school. As a result, students join the centre with significant gaps in their skills and knowledge, and with a negative view about themselves and towards education. The amount of time students spend at the centre varies, but the rate of progress is such that the large majority of students are very successful in making up for some of the lost time and overcoming several of the substantial barriers they faced when they started.

Students' attitudes and confidence develop rapidly as they experience a highly supportive learning environment and individualised learning programmes which enable them to succeed. Students' willingness to participate in learning, as seen in English when they were exploring the concept of loneliness, reflect good and sometimes outstanding learning. Students also show great satisfaction in completing practical tasks and talking about what they are doing in lessons that engage them and draw upon their interests. In science, for example, students were investigating what happens when magnesium is placed in different concentrations of acid. In construction, students were building a wall in preparation for one of several assessments. Progress in literacy and numeracy is good. Students show great pride in their work, although extended writing remains a challenge for some. Practical and creative skills shown in subjects such as art and hair and beauty are often well developed. Because individual needs are identified from the start, there are no significant variations in the rates of progress made by boys and girls, or those pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Students make outstanding progress in learning about themselves and improving their self-esteem because of the sensitive and individualised support provided by staff and other professionals. These positive characteristics successfully increase students' interest in education, with many enjoying learning for the first time. Behaviour is excellent and students play a positive role in the centre, both in lessons and during break time. The openness in the relationships underpins an environment that has clear expectations that are consistently applied. Students are polite and talk with staff and visitors in a respectful manner. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. This enables students to reflect on their own and other people's experiences and to develop respect for each other's views. Students see their time in the centre as an opportunity to turn their lives around. Parents and carers report that their children's behaviour has improved at home and dramatically improved attendance reflects positive attitudes. For most, it is the first time they have attended school on a regular basis.

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*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

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

<sup>1</sup> 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?

Strengths of teaching lie in a thorough knowledge of each student and the collaborative approach taken by teachers and other adults, who provide closely tailored support. Strong relationships with students help staff to manage behaviour and encourage them into doing their best. Planning is detailed so that learning intentions are clear and lessons are well paced. Students' contributions are shared with sensitivity and used effectively to raise expectations for others. Teachers pay particular attention to key subject vocabulary to help students with their writing. Some teaching is outstanding. Where it is most successful, precise questioning is used effectively to probe students' understanding, challenge their thinking and help adjust the pace of learning. Assessment is closely linked to individual behaviour and academic targets. It is also used to help students celebrate progress and achievement.

A key strength of the curriculum lies in the four learning programmes and the way they can be adapted. These offer students individualised support and learning experiences that reflect their interests and closely match their needs. Particular attention is given to addressing students' emotional and/or social needs in the first instance. The personal, social and health education programme underpins the curriculum and forms a significant part of each student's personalised learning programme. The carefully constructed range of courses and activities include a realistic approach towards courses leading to GCSEs and

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opportunities for students to achieve external accreditation in, for example, skills related to the building industry, car mechanics and hair and beauty. The breadth of the curriculum is made possible by the different range of activities offered at college, outdoor activity centres, and by local businesses.

Staff show great resolve in ensuring that students are exceptionally well cared for and supported. The high quality of the care, support and guidance is recognised and valued by parents and carers. One parent's comment represents the positive response made by others, 'I am very grateful to all those who encourage and praise her... and have played a significant part in shaping the person she has become.' Students have a good understanding of their targets for personal and academic development, and appreciate how the consistent and sensitive support has a positive effect on their self-esteem. Staff are extremely alert to the fact that no two days are alike and students can arrive on any day with varying levels of interest and willingness to engage. Attention to students' health and well-being is reflected not just in opportunities for physical activity but also in the provision of healthy food and health-related courses. The outstanding support and guidance are recognised by local schools who value the quality of the timely and skilful support, together with the positive influence it has on students who are at risk of exclusion. The impact of the provision on those students who are cared for by the local authority is striking. Their attendance at the centre is at 100 per cent and their behaviour at home has improved substantially.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The quality of teaching</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
<b>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</b>	<b>1</b>

## How effective are leadership and management?

Leaders and managers, under the leadership of a resolute and insightful headteacher, have established a centre that places a high priority on developing students' confidence and lifting levels of achievement. Since the last inspection, developments to the curriculum have led to an increased focus on achievement for all students. The individual is at the hub of the provision which promotes equality and tackles any form of discrimination exceptionally well. The leadership team, with close support from committed staff and the management committee, has ensured that the centre has placed a high priority on working towards a common goal and establishing excellence in all aspects of its work.

The highly-effective and well-qualified management committee provides an extremely good level of challenge and support. It uses its range of expertise to ensure that the centre remains at the cutting edge of best practice. Attention to students' safety is integral to its work and safeguarding procedures are highly systematic, continually reviewed and very firmly established. All staff benefit from appropriate training. Strong links with outside

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agencies are highly effective in making a contribution to the wide ranging achievements of students, including those whose circumstances make them vulnerable to underachievement. Community cohesion is promoted exceptionally well in the two areas where the provision is located. However, staff know that they have not yet developed links with areas further afield in this country and others to the same level, and are appropriately planning to do so. Parents and carers are closely involved with the planning of their children's provision. The centre works extremely hard with families to maximise the support it can provide.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

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

## Views of parents and carers

A much smaller-than-average proportion of parents and carers returned questionnaires for this inspection. However, the large majority of those responding expressed positive views about the centre's work. A minority of parents or carers made written comments. Almost all of these expressed considerable satisfaction with the centre and included positive remarks about the caring and supportive environment, the quality of the staff, the range of learning opportunities, and the influence the centre is having on their children's behaviour and attitudes.



## Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at the North 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 inspection team received 14 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 83 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	2	14	7	50	3	21	1	7
The school keeps my child safe	6	43	7	50	0	0	1	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	10	71	3	21	1	7	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	2	14	9	64	1	7	1	7
The teaching is good at this school	6	43	7	50	1	7	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	4	29	7	50	1	7	1	7
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	5	36	7	50	0	0	1	7
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)	5	36	6	43	0	0	1	14
The school meets my child's particular needs	5	36	7	50	0	0	1	7
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	6	43	8	57	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	5	36	7	50	1	7	0	7
The school is led and managed effectively	7	50	6	43	1	7	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	6	43	5	36	1	7	1	7

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	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](http://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"> <li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li> <li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li> <li>■ The quality of teaching.</li> <li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.</li> <li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li> </ul>
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 March 2011

Dear Students

**Inspection of North Area Pupil Referral Unit (North Herts Education Support Centre), Hitchin, SG5 1JW**

Thank you for all the help you gave me when I visited your centre. I enjoyed talking to you, sitting in your lessons and listening to your interesting views. You told me that the centre makes a significant difference to your behaviour and attitudes to learning. It is clear that you value the life-changing opportunities that the centre offers you.

This letter is to tell you about some of the things I found while I was with you. It is an outstanding centre, where you feel extremely safe and secure and enjoy taking part in the wide range of interesting and meaningful activities. It is a place that is enabling you to be successful and to learn more effectively than you were able to in the past. Staff have high expectations of you and provide clear guidelines for you to follow. Almost all your parents and carers expressed considerable satisfaction with the centre.

Here are some other important things about your centre.

It is exceptionally well led and managed.

Effective teaching helps you to make good progress.

Behaviour is outstanding and you are considerate towards each other.

You achieve well when account is taken of your starting points when you join.

The majority of those in Years 10-11 are on track to reach standards in some external examinations and assessments that are broadly similar to those found in mainstream schools

Most of you go on to college, employment or training as a result of having done so well.

All staff take extremely good care of you, and make sure you have a good understanding of what makes for a healthy lifestyle and a healthy diet.

To make things even better for you, staff have been asked to prepare more precise questions in lessons to find out what you know and to challenge you to think more deeply about your answers.

I wish each one of you every success in your future and hope that you continue to help yourselves to make things better.

Yours sincerely

Paul Canham

Lead inspector

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