

The Park Education Support Centre

Inspection report

Unique reference number	130348
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	381264
Inspection dates	20–21 March 2012
Lead inspector	James Bowden

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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	74
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Headteacher	Sara Johnson
Date of previous school inspection	22 September 2008
School address	New Barnfield Travellers Lane Hatfield AL10 8XG
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Age group	11–16
Inspection date(s)	20–21 March 2012
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Introduction

Inspection team

James Bowden

Additional inspector

Gill Smith

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Ten lessons were observed, taught by eight different teachers and two tutors. Discussions were held with the chair of the management committee, the executive senior leadership team, the extended senior leadership team and with a small group of students. The inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, observed the centre's work, and looked at students' files, curriculum plans, tracking data showing students' progress, attainment, rates of attendance and students' work, including display in and around the classrooms. Questionnaire responses from four parents and carers, 39 staff and 29 students were analysed.

Information about the school

This is a pupil referral unit for students who have been permanently excluded from mainstream schools or who may be at risk of exclusion. It takes referrals from 55 primary schools and 10 secondary schools. The centre also provides outreach support to mainstream schools for students in Key Stages 1 to 4 with behavioural, social and emotional difficulties. The centre is situated on two sites some five miles apart. The Hatfield site, shared with other county council services, provides for Key Stage 3 students and the Learning Centre in Potters Bar provides for Key Stage 4 students.

Students in Key Stage 3, and some in Year 10, are prepared for re-integration to mainstream schools. Year 11 students are generally full-time at the centre. There are almost twice as many boys as girls. The large majority of students are of White British heritage, with a very few from Traveller backgrounds. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is above average. All students have special educational needs, most commonly associated with complex behavioural, emotional and social needs.

A new headteacher was appointed in April 2010. In the same year, the centre gained the ICT Excellence 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	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- The centre provides a good quality of education. It is successful in meeting its core aim of providing a learning environment which meets the needs of all so that students can move back to a mainstream school or continue their education at college or through training when they leave at the end of Year 11. Overall effectiveness is not outstanding because the monitoring and evaluation of progress for students at Key Stage 4 in the courses run by alternative providers is not sharp enough and the rates of attendance of Year 10 students are not improving rapidly enough. In addition, the quality of targets set in students' behavioural support and individual education plans lack clarity in detailing what exactly is expected of students.
- Students' attainment on entry to the centre is often very low. However, the quality of learning is good and all groups of students achieve well during their time at the centre. Emphasis is placed on developing the key skills of literacy and numeracy across the curriculum.
- The quality of teaching is good and planning ensures that work is matched appropriately to individual students' capabilities. Teachers make expectations clear to students and use questioning effectively to extend learning.
- Students' behaviour over time improves and learning is not unduly disrupted because staff are highly skilled in behaviour management. The centre provides a safe place for students to learn.
- Leadership and management of the centre are good, including the leadership of teaching and management of performance. The new executive senior leadership team has high expectations for what every student can achieve. A particular strength is the centre's outreach service to mainstream schools. This has resulted in a significant reduction in the rates of permanent and fixed-term exclusion in the partnership schools supported.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Accelerate students' achievement further by:
 - sharpening the monitoring and evaluation of students' progress in the alternative provision in order to plan future strategies
 - ensuring that all targets set in students' behaviour support plans and individual education plans are clear and concise so that students know exactly what is expected of them
 - increasing the rates of attendance of Year 10 students.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Students' low attainment when starting at the centre is usually a result of their negative experiences of mainstream education and, in some cases, considerable gaps in schooling because of their behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. Careful assessment of capability on entry informs the centre as to the range of support and learning best suited to students, which rekindles their interest in learning and results in good achievement. In lessons observed during the inspection, students were well motivated and worked well independently, as well as in pairs. Overall, in relation to their starting points, the centre's tracking data show that there are no significant differences in the progress and achievement of different groups of students, including those whose circumstances make them the most vulnerable. This is because of the extra support provided where necessary. A steady rise in attainment overall is helping to prepare students better for the next stage of their education at the end of Year 11. The proportion of students achieving GCSE accreditation is improving, as is the number going on to college.

Effective assessment and tracking procedures support students' learning well. However, some of the targets in students' individual education plans do not make clear what is specifically required and by when. Notwithstanding this, students' progress in literacy and numeracy at both key stages is good and rapid short-term improvement is made in reading by all. Year 9 students read aloud confidently and competently when asked to do so by teachers, as did Year 11 students in a science lesson. In all lessons observed, key specialist vocabulary was a focus. Progress is accelerated because teachers ensure students understand fully the key words central to the learning objectives. Work seen in lessons, in students' folders and displays round the centre shows good progress is also being made in personal, social and health education. In an English lesson, they learned about the work of the British Heart Foundation.

Although few parents and carers responded to the inspection questionnaire, the large majority were positive in their views of the progress being made by their children, a view endorsed by inspection evidence.

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Quality of teaching

A particular strength of teaching is the consistent way in which staff manage students' behaviour and how well they know the students. A flexible, yet firm, approach enables the behavioural needs of students to be met. Underpinning this is the structured start to lessons where learning intentions and outcomes are made clear. This results in a positive and engaging learning atmosphere. It was particularly effective in an art lesson where students were using specific information and communication technology (ICT) programmes to manipulate and adapt images for their projects on developing and producing work in the style of chosen artists. Teachers' use of ICT to enliven learning is a strong feature in all lessons across the centre and has been recognised by the ICT Excellence Award. Teachers are adept at using questions to help them gauge students' progress and, where appropriate, to extend students' learning. In many lessons, teachers make good use of opportunities to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. This was seen, for example, in an English lesson looking at Shakespeare's *Macbeth* where students showed a keen interest in discussing different beliefs. Overall, the planned curriculum supports teachers' work and the content of lessons matches students' needs and interests well.

In lessons, staff work effectively as a team, particularly in the consistent way that they ensure students stay on task. Occasionally, however, those in supporting roles have a tendency to suggest ideas directly or provide answers to students too quickly rather than giving them more time to independently consider their responses. This sometimes reduces the effectiveness of their support. Students' work is assessed regularly and, in the main, teachers provide helpful feedback to support improvement. However, in a few cases, students do not always respond to teachers' comments as to missing work or what they should do to improve the quality of their work. Of the few parents and carers who responded to the inspection questionnaire, the large majority are happy with the quality of teaching, as are most students; a view endorsed by inspection evidence.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Typical behaviour over time is good. For most students, this represents a vast improvement compared with their behaviour in their mainstream schools. When appropriate, the centre will and does apply the use of short fixed-term exclusions to good effect. Incidents of bullying or harassment, including those based on race, gender or sexuality, are few, and are, as confirmed in discussion with students and their questionnaire responses, dealt with quickly and effectively if they do occur. Students are aware of the different forms of bullying, including that using new technologies, and know what to do should they encounter bullying of any kind. Without exception, the few parents and carers who responded to the inspection questionnaire felt their children feel safe at the centre. Indicative of students' positive attitudes and behaviour is how well the centre is cared for, including displays of work in and around classrooms which are respected and appreciated.

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Behaviour and attendance are monitored against the targets in students' behaviour support plans. Although behaviour improves as a result of this, the targets set often lack clarity, which means students are not always fully aware of what exactly they need to do and by when. Although a small minority of parents and carers, students, and a few staff, had reservations about standards of behaviour, they were far more positive about how well the centre dealt with this. This was confirmed during the inspection where staff managed behaviour very well; no instances of learning in lessons being disrupted by untoward behaviour were seen. Where students were unsettled, they were escorted calmly from the lesson so as to allow others to continue their learning.

Attendance is an effective focus of the centre's work. Current data show that attendance improves over time and for some individuals has improved rapidly compared with their previous attendance. Overall, attendance is in line with that expected for special schools and pupil referral units, particularly in Key Stage 3. Attendance rates at Key Stage 4 are also improving but less so for Year 10 students over time. Where there has been persistent absence, the centre involves outside specialist help to support its work.

Leadership and management

The new executive senior leadership team's ambition and ethos of high expectations of students and teachers underpins the work of the centre. There is a clear and consistent programme to ensure all students achieve their potential and to improve the quality of teaching. This has resulted in good improvements, as shown by analysis of year-on-year school data. The centre is managing well and providing effectively for the changing nature of students' needs, with referrals now including students with more complex needs and challenging behaviours. Staff morale is high, there being a shared vision for moving the centre forwards. The experienced management committee is very effective in its role as a critical yet supportive friend of the centre, as is the local authority in its governance role. Provision is enhanced through strong links with mainstream schools and other specialist professionals. A particular strength is the centre's outreach programme in mainstream schools which has led to a significant reduction in fixed term exclusions and no permanent exclusions since April 2010.

Equality of opportunity is promoted effectively and any discrimination tackled immediately. The curriculum is tailored effectively to ensure individual's learning needs are met. Many Key Stage 4 students now benefit from the courses offered by the alternative providers the centre uses. Although students attending these courses are monitored, the centre is aware that the evaluation of their progress lacks sharpness, which currently inhibits planning for future strategies. The curriculum is effective in supporting students' personal, social, health and citizenship development. There are, for instance, many opportunities for sporting activities throughout the week. In addition, the curriculum supports well students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, while ensuring they develop a growing awareness of the local community and beyond.

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Increasingly accurate self-evaluation informs the centre's strategic improvement plan; demonstrating the capacity for further and sustained improvement. Essential procedures that ensure the smooth day-to-day running of the centre are in place, including robust safeguarding arrangements such as for safe recruitment practices and risk assessments for the alternative provision and work experience. Of the few parents and carers who responded to the inspection questionnaire, the large majority are positive about their children's experiences at the centre.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



22 March 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of The Park Education Support Centre, Hatfield, AL10 8XG

Not so long ago, two of us came to the centre to see how you are getting on. We also wanted to know whether we could suggest anything to make things even better for you. We thoroughly enjoyed our time at the centre, meeting a small group of you and talking with individuals. Most of you who responded to the inspection questionnaire said the centre helped you to do well, adults explained to you how to improve your work and that the centre deals with bullying very well. Our visit confirmed this. We found that the centre provides you all with a good quality of education.

Here are some of the other good things we found.

- In Key Stage 3, you are being prepared well for re-integration into mainstream school and, by the end of Year 11, for the next stage of your education.
- Teachers make sure you know what you are expected to learn in lessons.
- Most of your behaviour in lessons is good and you get on well with all the adults you work with.
- The good curriculum provides lots of interesting things to do and improves your personal development, as well as your progress in learning.
- The headteacher and her staff have plans to make things even better for you.

We found the centre could make some changes to improve your learning and achievement even further. We have, therefore, asked the headteacher to ensure behaviour support plans and individual education plans tell you exactly what you have to do to improve. The centre also needs to check more carefully how well those of you in Key Stage 4 are doing in your off-site courses.

You too can help by continuing to work hard and those of you in Year 10 need to improve your attendance. I would like to wish you all the best for your future education.

Yours sincerely

James Bowden
Lead inspector

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