

Link Education Centre (Sedgemoor)

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	134758
Local Authority	Somerset
Inspection number	381731
Inspection dates	4–5 October 2011
Reporting inspector	Sarah Mascall

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	8
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Chair	Pat Parker
Headteacher	Bev Fournier
Date of previous school inspection	4 February 2009
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one additional inspector. The inspector visited seven lessons and observed six teachers and support staff in the centre. Meetings were held with staff and students, the chair of the management committee and a representative from the local authority. The inspector also visited the education centre at Wessex House. Students' work, information on progress, safeguarding policies and other documents were evaluated. Questionnaires from seven parents and carers, 13 staff and six students were scrutinised.

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

- The impact of the variable attendance of some students on their progress.
- The effectiveness of leaders in monitoring all aspects of provision.
- Is the curriculum enabling students to gain a range of experiences that support their learning effectively?
- How challenging students' targets are in ensuring that they make the progress they should both in their personal development and academically.

Information about the school

The pupil referral unit (PRU) provides for students who have medical needs mainly as a result of complex emotional and psychological difficulties. The centre provides mainly for Key Stage 4 students. A small number of younger pupils and students are taught by teachers in their homes. A few receive support from the centre in their mainstream schools. The vast majority of students remain on the roll of their mainstream schools. Almost all students are of White British heritage, and there are more girls than boys. At the time of the inspection there was a very small number of students with a statement of special educational needs or in the care of the local authority.

The centre has responsibility for overseeing the work of the education centre at Wessex House which is a hospital unit for young people with mental health issues. No teaching was observed within this setting.

Since the previous inspection the centre has moved twice. It has been in its present premises since the end of September 2010.

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?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

The Link Centre provides a good education for its students. Effective leadership has ensured that systems for care, guidance and support are outstanding. This results in a centre that is a very positive and caring environment which supports students in developing their confidence and self-esteem in order to become effective learners. Students benefit from good teaching both in the centre and in outreach programmes which ensures they make good and often outstanding progress and achieve well.

Staff's very good understanding of the needs of students is used well to ensure the curriculum is personalised to meet the needs of each individual. Students have opportunities to gain a good range of accreditation and many achieve well in their GCSEs. The excellent links with parents and carers do much to support students in their learning as do the outstanding partnerships with all the different agencies which are involved with the students and their families. Parents and carers are very positive about the centre and links with parents and carers are excellent. Students say they feel very safe in the centre because they can talk to staff about any concerns they have. For many students attendance is very good but a few, because of their medical conditions, struggle to get into the centre on a regular basis. The centre ensures that these students, where possible, continue with their studies at home and as a result their good progress is maintained. Teaching has many strengths and is good overall. The very good relationships between staff and students contribute greatly to the excellent behaviour within the centre. There are very good examples of feedback to students that help them know how well they are doing in their work and what they have to do to improve. Nevertheless, this good practice is not consistent across the centre. Community cohesion is satisfactory. The moves to different sites have restricted the centre's ability to develop as part of the local community. Work has already started to enable students to be more involved in the local and wider communities and so develop their understanding of life in a multicultural Britain. This though is at an early stage.

Strong leadership by the headteacher, well supported by a committed staff team, has ensured that the centre has improved well since its previous inspection. A strength of leadership is that, despite the various changes in accommodation, staff have maintained their high expectations of what students can achieve and they have continued to provide high-quality education. Self-evaluation is honest and accurate because the work of the centre is continually reviewed and as a result there is a good understanding of the centre's strengths and areas for development. Continual

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reviews by staff of the work they do ensure that the centre is quick to address any areas of weakness. As a result, the school has good capacity to sustain the progress it is making. The progress of individual students is monitored closely, ensuring that all have equal access and opportunity to all the centre offers. However, staff are at an early stage in analysing the progress of different groups. The management committee is appropriately informed about many aspects of the centre but the lack of information on the performance of different groups restricts its ability to effectively challenge staff to ensure that all students are making the progress they should.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that all students know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve further.
- Refine systems for monitoring and reporting the progress of students so that the management committee has a clear overview of the progress of the different groups within the school in order to provide more effective challenge.
- Strengthen links with the local and wider community so that students have a better understanding of life in multicultural Britain.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**2**

The attainment of students varies from year to year but overall is low. Many have previously been out of school for long periods of time and this has led to large gaps in their knowledge and understanding. Many students progress well at the centre to achieve passes in GCSEs and other accredited qualifications. Several make outstanding progress gaining GCSE grades above those predicted. Information gathered by the centre shows that all students achieve equally well. Students clearly enjoy their work in the centre and work hard in lessons. For example, a Year 11 student concentrated well in analysing the difference between the book and film versions of 'Great Expectations'. A Year 10 student was able, by the end of a mathematics lesson, to explain the difference between qualitative and quantitative data. Students make good progress in personal, social and health education (PSHE), developing a clear understanding of their emotions and gaining in confidence to express their ideas.

Students' spiritual, moral and social skills are promoted extremely well and they make excellent progress in these areas. Behaviour within the centre is exemplary. Students are polite and friendly and clearly enjoy the very positive relationships they have with staff and each other. This was very evident in a team building exercise when staff and students worked closely together in understanding what it must be like to be a blind sports person. Students state that everyone gets on well and that there are no issues with poor behaviour or bullying. The very positive ethos and sense of community within the centre contribute to students' sense of belonging. They have been actively involved in establishing a more eco-friendly environment and have had some input in aspects of the centre such as establishing the centre rules. Students are increasingly involved in the local community and have a growing

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understanding of different cultures. They are benefiting from local speakers coming in to talk to them and have raised money for charities, for example, to build latrines in Barundi. Last year they contributed to an arts week within the local schools' community and had the opportunity to work with others in drama and music. Students have a mature appreciation of what constitutes a healthy lifestyle, for example by knowing which foods deliver good nutrition. Many are developing an interest in sport and enjoy participating in the enrichment activities. Students make very good progress in their personal and social skills. This together with the skills they gain in literacy and numeracy ensures students are well prepared for the next stage of education and work. Last year all went on to college or training.

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	4
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	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	3
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Teachers' very good subject knowledge is used well to make lessons interesting and ensure students gain a good range of skills. They use questioning well to check how much has been understood and students are confident to ask when something is not clear. Teachers' planning is often very good, setting work for different students and ensuring that it is well matched to their individual needs. This was most evident in English. In one lesson, for example, one student worked on reading non-fiction and, through a range of different activities, understood the difference between fiction and non-fiction. At the same time a student was supported well to successfully identify how the author of 'Of Mice and Men' depicted the different characters of Lennie and George. The marking of work is often detailed but occasionally teachers fail to provide sufficient feedback to students about the level they are working at or what

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

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they need to do to improve their work further.

The curriculum supports students effectively both academically and in their personal development. The range of accreditation has been extended well since the previous inspection providing wider opportunities for students to achieve. The curriculum for PSHE enables students to gain confidence in their abilities and provides good opportunities for them to develop their social skills and understand how to interact with others. Considerable attention is paid to ensuring that students carry on with their work even if unable to attend because of their medical conditions. A virtual school programme has been developed and work is sent home as soon as a student is absent. The curriculum for students attending Wessex House is supported through their mainstream schools and is appropriate.

The very caring nature of staff, together with an extremely good understanding of students’ medical conditions, ensures that the care of students is outstanding. The excellent communication with parents and carers and the wide range of agencies associated with each student enable all students to be successfully supported to access and attend education and make progress both academically and in their personal development. Clear targets for progress are quickly established for each student and provide good challenge. These are shared with parents and carers and staff work very closely with families to ensure they have up-to-date information about how well their child is doing each day.

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	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The centre benefits from very determined leadership that has established a strong staff team clearly committed to providing the best possible education for all students. The monitoring of teaching and learning is effective in supporting staff to improve their skills. The headteacher has a good awareness of the strengths and weaknesses within the centre and this is shared well with staff. The centre has achieved much in gathering a range of data and use this well to check the progress of students on an individual basis. Staff are committed to ensure equality of opportunity and inclusion for all. Nevertheless, staff are not analysing this information in sufficient detail in order to pinpoint any variation in the progress of different groups within the centre.

The management committee supports the centre well. A specific link person visits the centre regularly. Reports from the headteacher to the committee are detailed and

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provide a clear overview of most aspects of provision. However, the management committee is hampered in challenging the centre more effectively because of the lack of detailed information concerning the progress of different groups. Safeguarding arrangements are excellent. Procedures for checking the suitability of staff are very rigorous. Community cohesion is satisfactory. Links with the local community are developing quickly. The school has already established some links both nationally and globally and has plans in place to develop these further.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
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	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Views of parents and carers

The very high return from parents and carers reflects their overwhelmingly positive views of the centre. Their comments can be summarised by one parent who wrote ‘I can only but praise the education that my daughter has and is receiving from the staff at Link Education Centre. The time and effort that is spent helping to nurture and support her through a difficult time is greatly appreciated.’

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at The Link Education Centre (Sedgemoor) 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 seven completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are eight pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	4	57	3	43	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	6	86	1	14	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	4	57	3	43	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	6	86	1	14	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	6	86	1	14	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	6	86	1	14	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	4	57	3	43	0	0	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	4	57	3	43	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child’s particular needs	4	57	3	43	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	4	57	2	29	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	3	43	4	57	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	4	57	3	43	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	6	86	1	14	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	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

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 2010 to 08 April 2011 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 2010/11 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.



6 October 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of The Link Education Centre, Bridgwater TA6 4RL

Thank you very much for being so friendly and helpful when I came to visit you recently. I very much enjoyed meeting you and a special thank you to those of you who took time to talk to me.

I agree with you that the centre is good. You told me how very safe you feel and how well staff support you. The care and support you get from staff are excellent. You have a good understanding of keeping healthy and I enjoyed watching you gain skills in team building and in playing basketball with staff.

Teaching is good and this ensures that you achieve well and make good progress. However, occasionally staff do not tell you how well you are doing and I have asked them to make sure they do this and tell you how you can improve your work. Although you have only just moved to your new building staff have already started developing links in the local and wider communities. I have asked them to extend these further.

The centre is well led and staff are committed to do the best for you. They have lots of information about how well you are doing and I have asked them to analyse this even more thoroughly so that they and the management committee have a better understanding of how the different groups in the centre are doing.

I wish you all well for the future and I hope you will try to be involved as much as you can in what goes on in the local and wider communities.

Yours sincerely

Sarah Mascal
Lead inspector

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