

Stevenage Education Support Centre

Chells Way, Stevenage, SG2 0LT

Inspection dates

5–6 December 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
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Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The leaders and managers do a good job. They make sure that the centre helps students to behave better and enjoy learning again.
- Teaching is good. Students are helped to catch up quickly and they make good progress.
- Students' behaviour and their personal and social skills improve quickly.
- Students' literacy and numeracy skills improve very rapidly at the centre.
- The centre works very well with a wide range of professionals and organisations to provide interesting experiences for students, and to help them individually.
- The centre and outreach service are at the heart of the Stevenage and North Hertfordshire schools community. Primary and secondary schools are full of praise for their work.
- The outreach service is very good at preventing pupils from being excluded and in providing advice for mainstream staff.
- Staff are happy and proud to work at the Education Support Centre, and are keen to help the students succeed.
- Parents and carers are happy with the improvement that both the centre and outreach service make in their children's behaviour, skills and attitude to school.
- Almost all students return successfully to mainstream school to continue their education.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The system for checking on and improving the quality of teaching is not sharp enough.
- Teaching is sometimes more concerned with what students should do than what they should learn.
- Some students' attendance is too low which affects their progress.
- The centre and outreach service review all aspects of their work. However, the information is not always summarised well enough to make it easy to see what works well and what could be improved.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed five lessons taught by five different teachers.
- Meetings took place with the headteacher and deputy headteacher, two local primary school headteachers and a primary school inclusion coordinator. Telephone conversations were held with the headteacher of a local secondary school, who is also the chair of the centre's management committee, and an assistant headteacher of another secondary school.
- A telephone conversation was held with a representative of the local authority who is also a member of the centre's management committee. Informal conversations took place with students throughout the inspection.
- There were too few responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, to be reported. The views of parents and carers given in the questionnaires they complete when their children leave the centre were taken into account.
- The inspector looked at a range of documentation including that relating to students' behaviour and progress, the centre's self-evaluation and evidence of improvement, curriculum planning, governance and information about how students are kept safe.

Inspection team

Judith Charlesworth, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The Stevenage Education Support Centre (ESC) has two functions. These are as a pupil referral unit, known as 'the centre', and an outreach service.
- The centre provides for up to 12 students in Key Stage 3 (aged 11 to 14) who have been excluded, or are at risk of being excluded, from mainstream schools in Stevenage and North Hertfordshire. A typical length of stay at the centre is between four and six months.
- The centre also offers a few students a half-term full-time placement (known as 'respite') after which they return to their mainstream school. These students are taught with the other students at the centre.
- Students are on the roll of both the centre and their mainstream school unless they have been permanently excluded. They are all supported by their mainstream schools at school action plus, or have a statement of special educational needs. There are no students at school action.
- A high proportion of students are known to be eligible for free school meals. This group attracts extra funding through the government's pupil premium, along with looked-after children and those from Forces families.
- All students have behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. These are often combined with other needs such as autistic spectrum disorder, learning difficulties, mental health issues or family problems. Typically, pupils are of White British heritage and there are more boys than girls.
- The outreach service provides support to primary and secondary schools in the Stevenage area. This is to help reduce the number of pupils who are excluded, and to provide advice to staff on managing behaviour.
- A new service 'Back on Track' has recently been established by the centre staff. This provides a few secondary-aged students with four two-hour afternoon sessions a week at the centre for a fixed period of time. In these sessions, students receive support for their personal development, literacy and numeracy.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching and learning so that more is outstanding by:
 - making sure that what students are intended to learn is clear in every lesson
 - ensuring opportunities are always provided to check that students have learned what was intended
 - streamlining individual education plans and 'implications for teaching' documents so that students' targets and how to achieve them are more directly linked
 - improving lesson observations so they are more consistently carried out and clearer about areas for improvement, and that these areas are systematically revisited to check on improvement.
- Improve the attendance of those students who attend erratically, so that they make better progress, by working further with students, parents and carers, external agencies and mainstream schools.
- Improve the use of the information collected on the effectiveness of the ESC's work by summarising it more sharply and consistently, so that it is easy to identify trends, strengths and where improvements need to be made.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Students' skills on entry to the centre are usually lower than expected for their age. They are often equivalent to those of a nine year old. This is due to students' behavioural difficulties which have affected their ability to concentrate and learn.
- Students make good progress and catch up well. This boosts their confidence and results in much improved attitudes to school. Most students increase their reading, spelling, writing and mathematics skills at a much faster rate than expected. They often leave the centre after just a few months with an increase in skills that normally take at least a year to achieve. Achievement in mathematics and information and communication technology is confirmed by external awards from the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA).
- Some individuals make excellent progress. For example, between January and July of this year, three students increased their reading and writing skills at three times the usual rate. However, some students' achievement is less marked. This is usually linked to erratic attendance or their particular difficulties.
- Students' academic skills and the strengths and weaknesses in the way that they learn are very thoroughly assessed when they first join the centre. The information is used to work out a detailed plan of support (known as 'implications for teaching') that applies in all subjects. For example, students with a reading age of eight years will receive extra help from staff for tasks in all subjects that involve reading, while a student with a reading age of 12 years will not.
- There is no significant difference in the achievement of permanently excluded students and those who were at risk of exclusion, those who are on respite placements, boys, girls or those known to be eligible for free school meals. Any slight differences in achievement are due to each individual's particular circumstances and difficulties.
- In all lessons observed, students worked hard and learned well. In a science lesson, for example, one student learned about the function of some internal organs of the body that he did not previously know. In an English lesson, students surprised themselves by writing a poem using single words and phrases. They learned the difference between paragraphs and stanzas (verses) and were very pleased with their results.

The quality of teaching

is good

- Teaching is good and the teamwork between teachers and other adults is excellent. Students' achievement is supported very well by the staff's detailed knowledge of each individual's strengths, needs, reading, spelling and mathematics skills. Resources and computer technology are well used to inform, interest and motivate students.
- Each student's learning style, such as whether they learn best through practical activities or by listening to explanations, is taken into account during lessons. Teachers prepare activities and resources that suit the group, and then tailor them to suit each individual.
- Support staff work very well to give extra help and encouragement. Sometimes they do the task themselves, alongside the students, so acting as a good role model. An excellent example of this was observed in a poetry-writing lesson where all adults wrote a poem with the help of clear,

simple, structured support.

- Teachers have very good knowledge in their own subjects. The mathematics teacher, for example, has written a special course of work that is designed to improve students' ability to add, subtract, multiply and divide – skills they must have before they can make further progress.
- Teachers take care to improve students' literacy skills throughout all lessons. In a history lesson on the First World War, for instance, students put forward their ideas of what their five senses might tell them about fighting at the front. Examples included the feel of the trenches, the sound of gun fire and the smell of explosions. Having compiled lists together on the board, students wrote descriptive letters 'home' from a soldier's point of view.
- Teachers use questioning very well. They pitch questions differently for each student to check on and extend their understanding, and to support their responses. Students are given constant feedback and encouragement throughout lessons, and clear praise about exactly what they have done well to encourage them further.
- In practice, most teaching is clearly aimed at what students need to learn next. However, this is often not shown well enough on teaching plans, which tend to indicate tasks and activities instead of learning aims. Occasionally, this means that teaching does not help students to learn as much as it could. While students enjoy what they are doing, it is not always clear what they are intended to learn, or whether they have achieved it.
- Individual education plans indicate targets for improvement in behaviour and reading, spelling, and mathematical ages. Apart from those related to behaviour, they do not include guidance on how to achieve these targets. This guidance is on the centre's helpful 'implications for teaching' information sheets, but the two documents are not directly linked together.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

are good

- All students involved in the ESC have behavioural difficulties that affect their ability to settle comfortably in school and learn as they should. Records show that incidents of poor behaviour decrease rapidly for students who attend the centre. This is due to good behaviour management and good teaching which improves students' social, literacy and numeracy skills.
- The work of the outreach service supports individuals and provides advice and training for mainstream school staff exceptionally well. This help improves pupils' behaviour because school staff become more skilled at managing it themselves. As a result, permanent exclusions from school are rare.
- Pupils supported by the outreach service, and students returning to mainstream school after attending the centre, benefit from excellent help and guidance from the ESC. The centre has outstanding reintegration practices. Support in mainstream continues for as long as students need it. This contributes to the ESC's success in helping students to complete their education there.
- The ESC staff care very much about each student's emotional and social well-being. Relationships between staff and all young people are outstanding and each is known as an individual. Staff work closely with parents and carers, mainstream staff and other professionals to ensure that students maintain their progress during and after the ESC's involvement.
- Students' behaviour and attitudes to learning are good. No disruptive behaviour was observed

during the inspection. However, records show that incidents do occur and that they are appropriately dealt with and reported. Students understand the centre's reward system and the benefits good behaviour and attendance bring. In lessons, students are keen to contribute to discussions and put forward their ideas, such as how they think war trenches were constructed. They enjoy the challenge of learning something new, and completing work they are set.

- Attendance figures have dipped recently. However, they are affected by one or two students' erratic attendance which affects their ability to progress at a fast rate. Nevertheless, last year, about half the students improved their attendance when compared with their attendance in mainstream, and several achieved 100% attendance.
- Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe and behave safely. Bullying, including internet bullying, is included. Students feel safe at the centre although they acknowledge that there were some incidents of bullying in the recent past. Staff have strengthened measures to stamp bullying out. Examples of these are 'kindness stickers' which are awarded for spontaneous acts of kindness, and a workshop run by external professionals on how language affects people.
- Parents and carers are very pleased with the work of the ESC. Last year, all parents and carers who returned questionnaires were entirely positive about the centre's work and the improvement in their children's behaviour and academic skills. One parent wrote: 'Excellent centre; my child has progressed so well and has become so much more content with life and a joy to be with'.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher and deputy headteacher are ambitious for the ESC. They are keen to extend its role further and help even more young people. Their vision is strongly supported by the staff who say they are very happy with the way the ESC works and are proud of their contribution to it.
- The staff work together very well as a team. They know each other well as most are long-serving and work both in the centre and in the outreach service. This helps them to share their expertise and experience with one another and with mainstream schools. It also helps students to settle easily into the centre and back into mainstream.
- All students, regardless of their needs, gender or circumstances are given equal opportunities for support, learning and returning successfully to school. Parents and carers often continue to seek support from the centre after their child has left.
- The ESC has many partnerships which enhance its work. The headteacher is well known and very well regarded. He sits on several local committees which ensures that the ESC contributes to authority-wide decisions. The deputy headteacher has responsibility for negotiating students' return to mainstream, and does this very successfully. The outreach service is very well managed and highly valued by the many schools that it serves. The centre's partnerships with schools allow students to use sporting and other facilities that the centre could not otherwise provide.
- The ESC knows its own strengths and weaknesses. All staff have subject responsibilities and evaluate how well their subject is working and whether students are achieving enough. However, the process is long-winded and tackled differently by different staff members. Clear outcomes of the evaluation process and points for development are not always included.

- The ESC keeps extensive records of the close checks it makes on students' progress and other aspects of its work. Nevertheless, these are often not well enough summarised to provide a clear, sharp overview on which robust plans for improvement and development can be based.
- The ESC has suitable procedures to check on the quality of teaching. Observations, though, are not systematic enough. Points for development are often not clear, and are not always revisited to check they have improved. Professional development for staff is ongoing and all training in statutory requirements, such as keeping students safe, has been completed.
- The subjects provided meet students' needs very well. At the centre, there is a focus on reading, writing, spelling, mathematics and personal development. These help students to conform, learn and catch up academically. Full-time students are also taught a broad range of other subjects, such as science, art, history, cooking and working with textiles. These help them to keep up with their mainstream classmates.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Their self-esteem, social skills and behaviour improve rapidly. Their success in some subjects is reinforced by external awards which boost their self-esteem and motivate them to do more. The centre also offers additional activities, such as visits to the theatre and go-karting, which enrich students' learning and add to their social and cultural development.
- The ESC is managed by the local authority and is a central part of its provision for young people with behavioural difficulties. Support, therefore, is two-way. Local schools benefit from the centre and outreach service, and so exclusions are reduced. The ESC benefits from the local authority's educational advice, the effective work of the management committee, and additional services such as educational psychology and mental health services.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The management committee includes many experienced, senior leaders in education. Members are well trained and knowledgeable. The committee understands the ESC's strengths and weaknesses due to good information that is regularly shared with members. It is fully aware of the difficulties the ESC currently faces, due to changes that are soon to be made to funding arrangements and the cancellation of a proposed move to better premises. The committee monitors expenditure and checks that it is having a positive impact on students' achievement. The extra money gained through the pupil premium is used to provide additional activities for students and particular support for individuals if required. The committee understands what skills are expected of competent teachers and managers, and the links between teachers' effectiveness and salary progression. The committee ensures that all policies are up to date and that statutory duties, including those to safeguard students, are fully met.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	130359
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	402419

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	11–14
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	9
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Headteacher	Philip Elcock
Date of previous school inspection	15 September 2009
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