

INSPECTION REPORT

LAUNCHPAD SUITE PUPIL REFERRAL UNIT

St Helens, Merseyside

LEA area: St Helens

Unique reference number: 132033

Head of Service: Mrs A. Brown

Reporting inspector: Mrs C. Marsh
002113

Dates of inspection: 16th – 19th October 2000

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE UNIT

Type of school:	Pupil Referral Unit
Age range of pupils:	14 - 16
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
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Appropriate authority:	St Helens
Name of responsible officer	Mr A. Hough
Date of previous inspection:	No previous inspection

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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Mrs C. Marsh 002113	Registered inspector	Equal Opportunities.	What sort of unit is it?
		Special Educational Needs.	How high are standards? The unit's results and pupils' achievements.
		Science.	How well are pupils taught?
		Personal, social and health education.	How well is the unit led and managed?
			What should the unit do to improve further?
Mrs M. Kerry 009931	Lay inspector		How high are standards? Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development.
			How well does the unit care for its pupils?
			How well does the unit work in partnership with parents?
Mr D. Bolton 001204	Team inspector	English. Mathematics.	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?
		Information and communication technology.	

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE UNIT

The newly set up (January 2000) Launchpad Suite Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) supports pupils in the 14-16 age range who have significant behavioural difficulties or who have been permanently excluded from St Helens schools. The unit aims to provide education appropriate to the needs of the pupil, with a strong emphasis on vocational education through a range of courses provided by St Helens College. The Launchpad Suite is one of two that form the recently established (September 1998) St Helens Pupil Referral Service along with a behaviour support service for mainstream schools. Up to 14 pupils attend the unit at any one time, some of whom are dual registered. At the time of the inspection 33 pupils were on roll. Of these, all were white and all but two were boys. 12 pupils had statements of special educational needs (emotional and behavioural difficulties and specific learning difficulties). The attainment of pupils on entry is below average.

HOW GOOD THE UNIT IS

Launchpad Suite PRU already has some good features, and is continuing to develop. There is a strong focus on inclusion. Pupils' personal development is good, particularly in terms of improved confidence, self-esteem and attitudes to work and to future educational opportunities. Given their starting points, most pupils achieve well and make good progress in English, mathematics and science, but they do not achieve well enough in personal, social and health education (PSHE) lessons. There is much good and very good teaching by qualified teachers. The teaching of PSHE, which is not taught by a qualified teacher, is poor. Thanks to strong links with the College and other providers, the PRU does well to provide for most pupils a reasonably broad and balanced curriculum. However, the "package" is not working for a few, very disaffected pupils, on the roll of the PRU, who fail to attend. There are strengths in the leadership and management of the unit, but also some weaknesses in day-to-day management, arising from the lack of an on-site manager. Accommodation is well cared for but is too cramped. The unit gives satisfactory value for money.

What the unit does well

- Pupils who attend the unit get back on track, as far as their education is concerned. They make good progress in their lessons (except PSHE). They gain confidence and self-esteem, and they achieve well.
- Teaching by qualified teachers is good. It accounts for pupils' improved learning and progress in most of their work.
- The idea of a full-time alternative curriculum, made up of a core of subjects taught in the PRU and a vocational course in the college, works well for those pupils for whom it is in place. This is helped by the good partnership with the local college.
- The course for pupils who have had serious attendance problems at school, and who are attending the PRU part-time as a way back into schooling, is proving of real benefit.
- The PRU is successful in promoting pupils' personal development and improving their behaviour.
- Relationships between teachers and pupils are very good. They are based on mutual respect.
- The PRU has a successful partnership with parents.
- The Pupil Referral Service is well led, with a strong commitment to inclusion.

What could be improved

- The planning and teaching of lessons in personal, social and health education are poor.
- A minority of pupils, with longstanding and severe difficulties, who are rightly on the roll of the PRU do not actually attend. They do not benefit from what the unit provides and cannot make satisfactory progress.
- The PRU is not able to cater adequately for pupils with statements of special educational needs for serious emotional and behavioural difficulties. This is not appropriate provision for such pupils.
- There has been too long a delay for some pupils in arranging the vocational course to go alongside the core subjects taught in the PRU itself.
- The PRU lacks an on-site manager, to make sure that day-to-day systems operate to best effect.
- Accommodation is cramped. There is no social area for pupils and no suitable accommodation for science.
- The various elements of information and communications technology (ICT) do not fit together coherently.

The areas for improvement will form the basis of the action plan prepared by the local education authority.

STANDARDS

The table summarises inspectors' judgements about how well pupils are achieving in relation to their individual targets by the time they leave the unit.

Progress in:	By age 16	Key	
English	B	Very good	A
Mathematics	B	Good	B
Science	B	Satisfactory	C
Personal, social and health education	E	Unsatisfactory	D
Other personal targets set at annual reviews or in IEPs*	B	Poor	E

** IEPs are individual education plans for pupils with special educational needs*

Given their prior attainment and previous educational history, most pupils make good progress, and some make very good progress. They catch up on work they have missed, as well as improving their confidence and their attitude to their work. They make good progress in the core subjects of English mathematics and science, thanks to the good teaching in these subjects. In PSHE lessons, because of poor planning and teaching by an unqualified teacher, pupils are making poor progress. In spite of this, because of the work done in other subjects such as English and science, and because of the example teachers set, pupils make good progress in their personal development overall. A minority of pupils who are on the roll of the PRU do not actually attend the unit. They do not have the chance to benefit from what the unit provides and cannot make satisfactory progress.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the unit	Positive, in most cases. The good support and guidance that they receive from the teachers help change pupils' attitudes, improve their work, and prepare them for the next steps in their lives.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	During the inspection, behaviour was good, helped by teachers' skilful, firm management of pupils. Records show that teachers do have to deal with instances of very challenging behaviour.
Personal development and relationships	Most pupils make good progress in their personal development. Relationships with teachers are very good.
Attendance	A real improvement for many pupils, but unsatisfactory overall because a minority of very disaffected pupils who are rightly on the PRU roll attend rarely or not at all.

The PRU is successful in helping pupils who attend to develop a positive attitude to their learning and to improve their behaviour. Through strong teamwork by committed teachers, the unit helps pupils to develop very good relationships. Pupils' personal development is good. This helps them to manage successfully on college courses and on work placements.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	
Lessons seen overall	Satisfactory overall – but good when taught by the qualified teachers.

Inspectors make judgements about teaching in the range: excellent; very good; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; poor; very poor. 'Satisfactory' means that the teaching is adequate and strengths outweigh weaknesses.

Teaching was satisfactory or better in 89% of lessons inspected. It was good or better in 76% of lessons, and very good in 18% of lessons. It was less than satisfactory in 11% of lessons inspected, all of which were taught by an unqualified teacher. In fact, the quality of teaching by all qualified teachers was good. The teaching of English and mathematics was good, and the teaching of science was very good. This accounts for the good learning and progress of pupils in most of their work. Numeracy and literacy are taught well. In contrast, the teaching of PSHE, which is in the hands of an unqualified teacher, was poor. In PSHE lessons, tasks are trivial, not enough attention is paid to individual pupils' needs, particularly their literacy needs, and relationships are confrontational. As a result pupils fail to learn. The rest of the teaching in the Launchpad Suite is good because teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve, and of their attitudes, effort and behaviour. Relationships are very good – caring but firm. There is a clear and consistent focus on learning, not just on improving behaviour. Teachers know pupils well and are flexible in their approach, tailoring the work to meet their individual needs. They make sure that each pupil is challenged to do better. Pupils are expected to work hard and they learn well as a result.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE UNIT

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The curriculum is working for some pupils, but not for others. It has some strengths, but is unsatisfactory because of a weakness in a key area – the poor quality of the PSHE programme and of its teaching.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Satisfactory. Teachers tailor what they provide to meet the needs of individuals. However, the unit is not in a position to meet the needs of a few pupils with statements of special educational needs (for emotional and behavioural difficulties) who are offered a few hours of teaching each week in premises outside the PRU, but who fail to attend.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Satisfactory. Teachers work hard to broaden the curriculum. Their personal example, the values the unit upholds, and the high quality of relationships, all help pupils' personal development. But social development is hindered by lack of a social area for pupils, too few opportunities for pupils to work in groups, and the poor quality of the PSHE programme.
How well the unit cares for its pupils	Procedures for child protection are very good. There is a good level of care and support for pupils, but arrangements for assessment and for tracking their progress need to be better co-ordinated and managed.

The unit works well in partnership with parents. There is good care and support for pupils. The curriculum in the unit has been developed alongside vocational courses in the college, to give full-time education and provide breadth and balance. This works well, once a suitable course has been found for pupils. Links with the college and other providers are good, but schools are not good at providing information on pupils' attainment. PSHE is a major weakness. A few pupils, who are taught off site, get only five hours of tuition. Provision for them does not constitute a satisfactory education.

HOW WELL THE UNIT IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The Head of Service (who is acting as head of the unit) and the LEA lead officer provide purposeful leadership which gives a clear steer to work of this relatively new and developing unit. They are well supported by the team of teachers. Together they present a consistent approach to the pupils and operate as a successful team. This pays off in terms of its positive impact on pupils' personal and academic development and on their standards of work.
How well the management committee fulfils its responsibilities	The committee's terms of reference are known and understood. It receives regular reports from the Head of Service. It is supportive of the work of the unit. At this relatively early stage in the unit's development, the committee is now ready to put greater emphasis on monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the unit.
The unit's evaluation of its performance	The LEA has a good number of ways of monitoring the unit's provision, particularly in terms of the hours provided for each pupil. However, the lack of an on-site manager, and failure to monitor teaching, have meant that weaknesses in the PSHE curriculum and its teaching have not been picked up and dealt with adequately.
The strategic use of resources	Good, with the exception of the deployment of an unqualified teacher to teach PSHE. This is not working.

Leadership and management by the head of the LEA Pupil Referral Service (who is currently managing the unit) and by the LEA are good. The LEA has a strong commitment to inclusion. The current lack of an on-site manager means that teaching is not monitored on a regular basis, and best practice is not as effectively shared as it could be. Statutory teacher appraisal is not yet in place. A refurbishment programme has made the accommodation a pleasant, attractive learning environment for pupils, but it is cramped. It lacks a social area for pupils and suitable accommodation for science. Teachers are committed, hard-working, and well qualified and experienced for the work they carry out, but the teaching of PSHE by a youth worker is unsatisfactory. The unit is adequately resourced and monies are used well. The LEA Service of which the PRU is a part is in a good position to monitor the actual cost of provision and to fulfil its intention of checking whether best value is being achieved.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE UNIT

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The progress their children make in the work they do. The change in their child's attitude to adults and to education. Their children like attending the unit. The staff of the unit are very approachable. The unit builds their child's confidence and self-esteem. 	Nothing reported by parents.

The inspection team agrees with the view of parents that the unit is successful in improving the attitudes of pupils who attend, helping their personal development and enabling them to make progress.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The unit's results and achievements

1. In the Launchpad Suite Pupil Referral Unit (PRU), there is a suitable focus on both learning and personal development. In the comparatively short time it has been open, an effective learning environment has been created, which is helping pupils to get back on track as far as their education is concerned. Overall, those pupils who attend the unit benefit significantly from their time there. Most of them make good progress and achieve well, except in personal, social and health education (PSHE) lessons. A minority of pupils who are on the roll of the PRU do not actually attend the unit. They do not have the chance to benefit from what the unit provides and cannot make satisfactory progress.

2. There is a range of attainment in the unit. Some pupils come to the unit having missed significant amounts of schooling; others transfer to the unit from mainstream school, with little or no break in their education. On the evidence of lessons and work inspected, standards are below average, and in some cases well below average, for pupils' ages in all subjects, including the core subjects of English, mathematics, science, and information and communications technology (ICT). But, given their starting points, pupils' achievement while at the unit is good and represents significant progress.

3. All pupils make progress, and many make good or very good progress in much of their work. The link with college courses is a very positive feature. There is good or very good teaching in all subjects which are taught by qualified teachers, and this is leading to effective learning and good progress. In personal, social and health education (PSHE), however, where lessons are currently taught by a youth worker who is not a qualified teacher, progress is poor.

4. Standards in **English** are below average. Last year, in the two terms following the opening of the PRU, pupils took an Achievement Test in Literacy, three gaining a qualification at Level 1, three at Level 2 and two at Level 3. This term, a few pupils are achieving standards in aspects of their written and spoken work that are close to the national average; others show considerable gaps in what they know and can do, often the result of disrupted schooling. A number of pupils come to the unit with significant problems of basic literacy.

5. Given their starting points, most pupils who attend the unit on a regular basis make good progress in English. Pupils build up a reasonable range of written work, in the limited time available. Thanks to the teaching and to the help they get in drafting and redrafting, they learn to make their writing more interesting, improving the structure, and choosing more interesting ways of expressing themselves. They learn to expand their ideas and to write more precisely. Even pupils who find writing difficult or irksome manage to produce pieces of writing, including poetry, which show growing sensitivity and sophistication, sometimes using compelling imagery. In their reading, pupils are learning to understand layers of meaning, to see how characters and themes are developed, and to discuss intelligently their own views about what they read. For many pupils, problems in spelling, punctuation, paragraphing or grammar persist; but, in most cases, these are being tackled in a systematic way, not least through individual learning programmes using the computers.

6. Pupils come to the unit with a wide range of prior attainment in **mathematics**. Last year, in the two terms since the PRU opened, pupils took an Achievement Test in Numeracy, one gaining a qualification at Level 1, four at Level 2, and two at Level 3. Overall, standards are below average, and in some cases well below. Nevertheless, the progress pupils make in

mathematics is good in most cases. It is best for pupils who attend on a regular basis and have enough sessions each week to make a real impact, maintaining the continuity. Some pupils have few mathematics sessions because of their other timetable commitments. When, on top of that, they miss lessons from time to time, progress is only just satisfactory. A mark of improvement is the growing confidence of many pupils and an increasing willingness to tackle mathematical problems and think things through for themselves. This comes as a result of the positive climate set by the teacher, as well as from pupils' own efforts and determination. Some pupils who came showing only limited facility with number have improved their ability to perform simple calculations. In work seen on handling data, pupils of a wide range of ability have made good progress relative to their varied starting points. Some have learnt to extract and interpret information given in simple tables or charts. Others have learnt how to calculate averages and to understand the difference between "mean", "median" and "mode". Still others have learnt to draw conclusions from scatter graphs and to understand the principles of correlation. In individual lessons inspected, pupils' learning and progress was good, and sometimes very good.

7. In **science**, attainment is below the level expected nationally for pupils' ages. However, given pupils' previous limited experiences, and, for some, an initial reservation about studying science at all, most pupils are making good progress. Pupils are, where possible, encouraged to take GCSE science examinations. These higher attaining pupils make clear gains in knowledge and understanding, as shown, for example, in the way they have improved their grasp of factors influencing genetics. Other, lower attaining pupils are able to link health with factors such as environmental pollution and sound nutrition. All show good use and understanding of appropriate scientific vocabulary. Pupils make less progress in developing their investigative skills, partly because of a lack of specialist accommodation and resources. They are, however, learning to make appropriate observations and measurements. From simple practical work, they improve their understanding of the principle of a fair test and some learn to work out for themselves the implications of this. They all have some understanding of the impact of man on the environment and learn to relate this to their own behaviours and interests. Their attainment in science on entry to the unit was low and their background knowledge of science was very limited. However, they have a sound understanding of the work they have covered in the units of work studied since being at the Launchpad Suite, as was evident in the lessons inspected and in discussions with pupils.

8. Pupils make at least satisfactory progress, and some make good progress, in using **information and communication technology (ICT)** to search for information (for example, using the Internet), to present their work (using word processing and simple graphics), and to help them in their work in other subjects (for example, using the *Successmaker* programme to improve basic skills). Most pupils are confident in using computers and become more proficient in handling the keyboard and mouse, in using icons, menus and toolbars on screen, and in operating various computer programmes. They learn about specific applications of information technology in ICT lessons. Last year, six pupils gained the Royal Society of Arts Stage 1 qualification in Computer Literacy And Information Technology (CLAIT) in elements of word processing. Three of these same pupils also achieved Stage 1 in spreadsheets, and two of them achieved Stage 1 in databases. Pupils' work in CLAIT lessons tends to be rather mechanical, either practising what they already know or following detailed, "fool-proof" instructions, without enough understanding of the underlying principles and without learning how to apply these in real-life situations.

9. Pupils make poor progress in **personal, social and health education (PSHE)** lessons. This is due to the poor quality of teaching, which does not ensure pupils are engaged or active learners, and to the inadequately planned curriculum. The instructor does not understand pupils' learning needs well enough. Tasks set are trivial and detract from learning and too often pupils are allowed to behave immaturely and sometimes with great

discourtesy. In these lessons, they are not learning how to function as individuals in society or how to manage the demands that are placed upon them. This is in stark contrast to the level of maturity which pupils displayed in all other lessons.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

10. The unit helps a significant proportion of its pupils to make good progress in their personal development and attendance. For these pupils, there is real improvement compared to what was happening before they came to the Launchpad Suite. However, there is a minority of pupils on the roll of the PRU who are not engaged with education, and whose needs are not met.

11. In lessons within the unit, pupils show positive attitudes to their learning. They accept that the business of the unit is education, and even difficult pupils will usually respond to the skilful management of staff and get on with the work in hand. When they achieve something, such as a piece of personal writing or the solution of a mathematical problem, they are pleased with their success and proud of their efforts, although they may appear outwardly dismissive.

12. Because they often lack confidence, pupils can become discouraged when work does not go well. With the sensitive support of staff, however, pupils will persevere to overcome difficulties and cope with mistakes. In all the lessons taught by qualified teachers, pupils were involved with their work, tried hard and worked with some degree of independence.

13. Behaviour in the unit is good. On placements, most pupils act responsibly and behave sensibly. Pupils undertaking vocational courses, or working on projects, are well motivated and interested in what they are doing. For many pupils, this represents real progress from what was happening when they were last in school. A few pupils have not yet learnt to control their behaviour well enough to take up the opportunities on offer.

14. Pupils generally make good progress in their personal development. They gain confidence and the ability to manage themselves more effectively in a wider range of situations. This is particularly evident when they are out on placements, where they often conduct themselves with good sense and maturity.

15. Relationships within the unit are a strength, characterised by real respect and warmth. The genuine attention paid to pupils by staff, combined with sympathetic but assured behaviour management, motivates and nurtures pupils, allowing them to grow and develop as learners and people. Within the unit, pupils show respect to staff and to each other, even though there may be friction with peers when they are outside.

16. Levels of attendance are unsatisfactory overall, because a significant minority of pupils who are on the roll of the unit rarely if ever attend. It needs to be recognised, however, that many of these pupils had entrenched attendance and other problems before admission to the unit. On the other hand, the majority of pupils attend well, both at the unit and on their vocational courses or other placements. In fact, as a general rule, pupils either attend well and make good progress, or do not attend at all. There is very little patchy attendance. The attendance of dual-registered pupils on the course designed to help them back into attendance at mainstream school is usually good.

17. For some pupils, attendance is greatly improved, compared with their previous record. Most pupils sustain attendance once they have started at the unit. A few attend for a short while and then their attendance deteriorates, and this may be related to a lack of quick

response to deteriorating attendance.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS TAUGHT?

18. Teaching was satisfactory or better in 89% of lessons inspected. It was good or better in 76% of lessons, and very good in 18% of lessons inspected. It was less than satisfactory in 11% of lessons seen, none of which was taught by a qualified teacher. In fact, the quality of the teaching by qualified teachers is good. The high level of good teaching by all qualified teachers accounts for pupils' good learning and progress in most of their work. This applies to all subjects when taught by teachers. In the 11 % of teaching that was less than satisfactory, all were lessons taught by a youth worker. The teaching of PSHE was poor or very poor in all lessons inspected.

19. A strength of most teaching is that the qualified teachers have a good grasp of the subjects they teach, even when the subject is not their main specialism, and a detailed understanding of what needs to be covered. These teachers are enthusiastic, and show it, and have high expectations of what their pupils can achieve. This enthusiasm is the key to arousing the commitment and interest of pupils. The teachers are clear about what they intend their pupils to learn. They explain the lesson goals to pupils, and make clear how long they have to complete the work. They successfully create a purposeful, supportive working climate. A calm, yet firm approach helps teachers to manage behaviour successfully. Effective strategies are used to help pupils maintain their concentration, and an appropriate range of resources, including the use of information technology, helps them to learn.

20. In all subjects except PSHE, lessons are well planned and structured and the teaching focuses on raising attainment and ensuring that pupils of all abilities make progress. The pace of learning is brisk but not rushed. Teachers draw on a wide range of methods to help pupils learn. Indeed, one reason for the success of the teaching is the teachers' flexibility in selecting and combining materials and approaches, to suit not only the aims of each particular lesson but also the interests and needs of the individual pupils concerned. They know their pupils well and use this knowledge to make sure that work is matched to what the pupils have already attained and to what they need to tackle next. Lessons include the effective demonstration of new skills, as in ICT, involving one-to-one support for individuals, helpful written materials, and opportunities for pupils to share their success. There is some paired and small group work, which is well managed and which gives pupils opportunities for personal development, including practice in speaking and listening. Relationships are very good, teachers are patient and dedicated, and pupils receive the praise and encouragement they need. Teachers make good use of humour to bolster some pupils' fragile, but growing, self-esteem. Teachers are good at assessing pupils' progress as an integral part of their teaching and at giving explanations and at questioning pupils.

21. Teachers have clear expectations of appropriate behaviour from pupils. They maintain a consistent focus on learning. As a result, pupils are usually motivated, committed, attentive and co-operative. During the inspection, they settled quickly to tasks and worked sensibly with due regard for the care of equipment.

22. At the time of the inspection, the specialist English teacher was absent and the lessons were being taught by another member of the team. The **English** teaching seen was never less than satisfactory; usually it was good. The teacher's understanding of pupils and her good insights into their thought processes and their feelings helped her create an atmosphere in which pupils felt secure and knew that their work and ideas were valued and respected. The teacher's own enthusiasm for the work helped stimulate pupils' imagination and creativity. She was effective in showing individual pupils how to extend and develop their ideas in their written work, explaining how to "paint a picture with words", suggesting how to

make descriptions more interesting, how to add humour or how to introduce an element of tension to the narrative. In lessons where pupils worked mostly on their own, the teacher was good at getting alongside pupils and helping them see how their work could be improved. At times, in these lessons, pupils were left too much to their own devices until the teacher came to work with them. Not enough was done to draw out and emphasise key teaching points for the benefit of all pupils. On the other hand, in a lesson where the teacher introduced a new short story to the class, key ideas were presented and developed in a clearly planned way, accessible to pupils of a wide range of ability. The teacher's questioning was good. It probed pupils' thinking and challenged them to explore their own reactions and to delve below the surface meaning. The teaching helped pupils to see how language is used to create particular effects.

23. The teaching of **mathematics** is good. The teacher conveys clear expectations that pupils can and will succeed. He establishes a good working climate, inspiring confidence and building pupils' self-esteem. He is good at getting pupils to overcome their reluctance, insecurity and fears about the subject. Pupils respond well to the teacher's calm, unruffled, friendly, but persistent manner. They know where they stand. The teacher is clear about exactly what is to be learnt in each lesson, with work pitched at levels suited to the different individuals in the class. For each pupil work is planned so that it progresses in logical, manageable steps. The teacher is good at explaining things clearly and at anticipating the problems that pupils are likely to have. He consistently reinforces necessary routines, such as labelling axes properly when drawing graphs, and teaches pupils the right mathematical language. The most effective parts of lessons are when the teacher is directly involved in questioning the pupils, getting them to think for themselves, to explain their working and to interpret their results. They are not allowed to "opt out", but are given time and encouragement to think. In one lesson, there was a visible look of enlightenment on the face of pupils, as they were helped to work out for themselves what the graph they had drawn actually meant in terms of real-life application. On a few occasions, these moments of direct teaching were too short for pupils to benefit fully, before they returned to their individual work.

24. The teaching of **Science** is very good. The specialist science teacher has good subject knowledge and is an enthusiast. Lessons are part of a scheme of work which takes good account of the requirements of external examinations and the National Curriculum. Learning objectives are properly identified. There is an appropriate emphasis on safety issues. Links with environmental issues and with a healthy life style are made explicit. The teacher knows pupils well and uses this knowledge to good effect to manage their behaviour and to ensure they learn properly. The pace is brisk and the teaching successfully captures pupils' interest. Explanations are very clear and the teacher is adept at making them relevant to pupils' own experience and interests.

25. The teacher is skilled at asking questions so as to draw out the main scientific ideas in a lesson, and at helping pupils to develop an appropriate scientific vocabulary. Through strong reinforcement of language, pupils were able to use the right scientific terms, with understanding and accuracy. Pupils are well managed and are successfully motivated by the teacher's interest and enthusiasm for the subject. Teaching is purposeful; it focuses clearly and economically on the key learning objectives; and the pace is good. The balance between teaching new subject matter and building pupils' understanding and skills through practical tasks is good, although opportunities for investigative work are limited by the lack of appropriate accommodation and space. Expectations of what pupils are able to write down, understand and assimilate are high. Higher attaining pupils are following a course leading to GCSE science. There are detailed written records of the work actually covered, the targets set, standards attained and progress made by pupils. This is handled well and is a key factor in the progress pupils make.

26. In the lessons inspected, the teaching of **information and communication technology (ICT)** was mostly good. However, in a lesson, (taught by an unqualified teacher) aimed at preparing pupils for the CLAIT qualification, the teaching was unsatisfactory. The pace was too slow and laborious, explanations were confusing and the pupil was expected to work in a mechanical way, following instructions without really understanding what he was doing and why. In lessons where pupils were using computers for themselves (including those where they were working on an individual learning programme), teachers struck the right balance between encouraging, maintaining the pace, helping pupils to solve problems that arose, and stepping in to teach or explain when the moment was right. In a lesson in which pupils were introduced to using a laptop computer, explanations were clear and, through skilful questioning, pupils were helped to draw on what they already knew, to work things out and to think about the application of what they discovered. They were given plenty of “hands-on” practice and their interest was held throughout.

27. There are major weaknesses in the teaching of **PSHE**, which is poor. The subject is taught entirely by an unqualified teacher (a youth worker), who does not have the necessary specialist subject knowledge. Lessons are not adequately planned and coordinated as part of a coherent scheme of work. Learning objectives are not properly identified and tasks set are trivial, failing to motivate pupils. The management of pupils’ behaviour is frequently unsatisfactory and, as a result, pupils too often fail to learn. The pace is too slow and the teaching fails to capture pupils’ interest. Explanations, when they are given, are not clear. Expectations of what pupils are able to write down, understand and assimilate are not matched to pupils’ individual needs. Written records of the work actually covered, of the standards attained and of the progress made by pupils are poor.

HOW GOOD ARE THE CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO PUPILS?

28. Although the LEA does not have an overall curriculum policy for all its PRUs, the Launchpad Suite has drawn up a clear policy for the curriculum it intends to offer. Its intentions for the curriculum are sound. The curriculum is based on the idea that a core of subjects will be taught in the Launchpad Suite itself, with a suitable emphasis on English, mathematics, ICT and PSHE, with science also taught to some pupils. This is to be supplemented with provision elsewhere, usually a vocational course taught in the further education college, bringing pupils’ education up to full-time. The vocational courses not only provide a new lease of motivation for some pupils, but also help prepare them for the world of work. There are proper opportunities for pupils to gain recognised qualifications.

29. In practice, these intentions are not always working out. The curriculum is working for some pupils, but not for others. It has some strengths, but is unsatisfactory because of a weakness in a key area – PSHE.

30. A drawback affecting the curriculum has been the delay for some pupils in arranging the vocational course to go alongside the core subjects taught in the PRU itself. Without this, the curriculum is too narrow.

31. At present, the curriculum is working best for dual-registered pupils. This includes a number of pupils who have had serious attendance problems at their mainstream schools, and who are attending the PRU part-time, as a way back into schooling. Most of these pupils make good progress in their work in the Launchpad Suite and establish good working habits and attendance patterns in the PRU. This has already helped some of them to pick up their school attendance again, although for most, this is a very gradual process. Other pupils who also remain on the roll of their mainstream school, have come to the unit because they were at serious risk of permanent exclusion. For most of these pupils, the “package” of time in the

Launchpad Suite (working on core subjects), coupled with a vocational course in the college, is providing them with an effective alternative education, and they are making progress in their learning.

32. For permanently excluded pupils (who are no longer on the roll of a mainstream school), the picture is mixed. For pupils who attend on a regular basis, the curriculum works well and the individually arranged packages are appropriate in most respects. This applies to about half of the permanently excluded pupils. For the others, many of whom have major personal and social problems and are extremely disaffected and as a result either fail to attend or fail to commit themselves properly to what is offered, the planned provision is not working. In other words, if pupils attend, the PRU makes a real difference to them.

33. There are a few other pupils who, for very good reasons, are not taught in the Launchpad Suite itself. Some are on full-time training courses purchased from other training providers, an arrangement which appears to be working satisfactorily. Three pupils are offered a few hours' individual tuition at premises elsewhere. In spite of the best attempts of the Pupil Referral Service to meet the needs of these challenging pupils, this level of provision is inadequate; and, in any case, the pupils usually fail to attend. The PRU is not in a position to meet the needs of these pupils who have statements of special educational needs in respect of significant emotional and behavioural difficulties.

34. In the Launchpad Suite itself, much of the curriculum is of good quality, helping pupils to learn effectively and make progress. A strength is the PRU's flexibility to tailor provision to meet the needs of individuals, whilst maintaining a well-planned balance within the limited range of core subjects offered. In English, mathematics and science, teachers plan work which is interesting and relevant, helping pupils of different levels of attainment to build on what they know and to tackle gaps in their learning. Teachers have drawn up suitable plans for work in these subjects for this term. They have not yet worked out longer-term plans in enough detail. In science, pupils do not have access to laboratories at present, and this restricts what can be taught.

35. Pupils are given some good opportunities to use and learn about computers and associated equipment, to access the Internet, and to become familiar with commonly used programmes. However, the various elements of ICT – for example, separate ICT lessons for some pupils, sessions where pupils are working towards CLAIT certificates, and the use of computers “for real” in other subjects – do not fit together coherently. The teaching programme needs pulling together, so that pupils can make better sense of what happens and see where they are heading.

36. An important weakness of the curriculum is the poor quality of the PSHE programme and of its teaching. At present, the taught programme is not well enough planned and thought through. It is too narrow and lacks coherence. The lessons devoted to “life skills” (which stand as an important element of the PRU's intended curriculum), and the teaching methods actually used in these lessons, do not do enough to help pupils to understand and manage themselves better, or to equip them for the next steps in their life. The local careers service makes an important contribution to careers education and guidance, although this has not yet been integrated in a meaningful way into the taught PSHE programme. Health education, sex education and attention to drug misuse have not yet been adequately planned into the programme.

37. In spite of this important weakness, teachers work hard, and to good effect, in other subjects to broaden the curriculum and to help pupils' personal development. They take opportunities to follow up interests shown by individual pupils, bringing in aspects of history or geography, making connections with art or music, or encouraging pupils to search for further

information on the Internet. A poet has agreed to spend a few days in the PRU, talking about his own work and working with pupils on their creative writing. Occasional visits are planned, for example to a science exhibition. There are opportunities for some pupils to take part in an outdoor pursuits programme. "Theme weeks" are organised each term. Last term's Celtic Week gave pupils the chance to sample a wider range of subjects and activities than normal, as well as to think about their own and other cultures and beliefs, both now and in the past. There are good opportunities in lessons, for example in English and science, to think about moral and social issues. Teachers also provide additional sessions of study support, where pupils can be helped with the work they are doing in the PRU, on their college courses or at school. Pupils are encouraged to take responsibility and show initiative – for example, the enterprising way in which pupils produced their own magazine last term, which is being followed up with a further edition this term.

38. Such activities encourage pupils' personal development, as do the personal examples of the teaching staff, the values they promote in their teaching and in their dealings with pupils, and the quality of relationships they engender. However, pupils' social development is hindered by a number of factors. Firstly, the PRU lacks a social area where pupils can gather and which they can call their own. Secondly, the predominance of very small teaching groups (or individual tuition) reduces the opportunity for pupils to interact and to learn to work together. Most significant, however, is the poor quality of the taught PSHE programme.

39. The PRU has links with a number of agencies that can be expected to make an important input into pupils' education at the unit. At this stage in the PRU's development, this has not been planned into the curriculum. Curriculum links with schools are not strong enough, particularly in terms of the flow of information from most schools about the attainment of pupils joining the PRU.

HOW WELL DOES THE UNIT CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

40. The unit gives effective support to its pupils, encouraging them to develop as people, and to learn. The warm relationships which teaching staff have with pupils are the essential foundation of the unit's success in helping pupils improve their learning, attendance and behaviour. Teachers have a very clear commitment to, and sense of responsibility for, the pupils in their care.

41. "Key workers" know pupils and their circumstances very well. They act as an important point of contact. Their monitoring of pupils' progress, especially in personal development, is based on thorough knowledge. There is also monitoring of pupils when they are on projects, courses or placements, by a pupil support officer. These personal contacts make pupils feel supported and valued, which in turn helps them to succeed in their chosen areas.

42. There is a good deal of informal feedback on how pupils are progressing when they are outside the unit. This usually comprises comments on confidence, self-esteem, behaviour and attendance. At present, information obtained from, for example, internal reviews on college courses or placements is not systematically co-ordinated and fed into pupils' reviews in the PRU.

43. Reviews are regular and there is good involvement of parents. The attendance of other agencies is more variable. Individual education plans have targets that are often extremely general, both as regards behaviour and learning. The targets are therefore difficult to review, and are not precise enough to help all concerned to recognise progress made in small but significant steps. Some systems for recording progress, such as daily logs, are not adhered to consistently. Much knowledge about pupils resides in people's heads, rather than

being drawn together into a comprehensive picture at review.

44. The recording of attendance is effective, both when pupils attend the unit and when they are placed outside. However, there is sometimes too long a gap between pupils failing to attend elsewhere and the unit being aware of it. In view of the nature of many of the pupils, this is a concern. Combined with the unit's own inconsistency in implementing a first day response to absence, this means that not enough is being done to promote the attendance of very vulnerable and volatile pupils.

45. Unit staff work extremely closely with the education welfare service, which is only recently established centrally within the LEA. Very good use is made of all available means of persuasion or sanctions to bring home the message to parents that pupils must attend. The use of strategies such as attachment orders is still fairly recent. There is very good knowledge of pupils and their circumstances, and there are useful links to other agencies such as the Youth Offending Team.

46. The qualified teachers manage pupils' behaviour with skill, tact, courtesy and firmness. The respect they inspire is a key element of the successful promotion of good behaviour within the unit. Pupils know that staff are genuinely interested in them and their work. Teachers are highly adept at avoiding unnecessary confrontation.

47. Procedures for assessment within the unit are satisfactory overall. When pupils arrive, there is often little information about their attainment, especially if they have been out of school for some time. Currently, in the absence of more rigorous baseline assessment data, teachers rely heavily on their intuitive professional judgement. Whilst, for the most part, this results in suitably matched work, more diagnostic information would be helpful, although the unit is rightly careful not to intimidate pupils on entry with batteries of tests. Once pupils are established in the unit, teachers make very good use of their on-going assessment to plan future work for individuals. Teachers record the progress and attainment of pupils over time, but, at this stage in the PRU's development, this is not done in a consistent, systematically co-ordinated way.

48. Arrangements for child protection and health and safety are good. The unit has access to trained advice and support on child protection, and a clear referral mechanism. There is monitoring of possible patterns of concern, and good awareness of the welfare of vulnerable pupils. Any health and safety concerns regarding premises have been promptly dealt with.

HOW WELL DOES THE UNIT WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

49. The unit has a successful partnership with parents. The major strength is in personal contact and relationships with parents, who recognise the good progress pupils make in their personal development when they come to the unit. There is an informative welcome booklet, which is addressed to pupils, but clearly expects parental involvement. Parents are invited to half-termly reviews and most come.

50. Parents are very pleased with what the unit offers their children. The unit has the support of most parents, and some are highly appreciative of the unit's work with their children. Particularly appreciated are the pupils' gains in confidence and self-esteem, and this is directly attributed to the personal involvement and support of staff. The individual attention, small group sizes and access to vocational courses are seen by parents to benefit their children and enable them to succeed.

51. Teachers of the unit make a real effort to be involved with pupils. They expend

considerable effort to keep contact with all parents, even where the response is discouraging. There is a strong focus on early involvement, with home visits for every pupil prior to entry. Each pupil is allocated a teacher to act as a key worker and evidence shows teachers deal sensitively and skilfully with parents, as for example in the case of a parent wanting their child to remain in the PRU, whilst the school wanted the pupil to return to mainstream lessons. The unit is able to win the trust and confidence of parents, even when pupils themselves may feel disaffected. The unit works well with the education welfare officer, who maintains good contact with parents.

52. Annual reports give parents a clear picture of behavioural progress and are realistic, yet positive, about pupils. Comments on reports are best in the subjects of English and mathematics, making clear how pupils can improve. The information given to parents, including through reports and their involvement in reviews, means that they have the opportunity to be well informed. The review process involves parents well and their views are listened to. Parents are informed of the actions resulting from these reviews, and they value this.

53. There is a flexible and sensible policy on homework. Those who can reasonably be expected to do it, are given homework. It is used constructively to reinforce and extend learning.

HOW WELL IS THE UNIT LED AND MANAGED?

54. The Head of Service and the LEA lead officer provide purposeful leadership which gives a clear steer to the unit's work. There is a strong commitment to inclusion. The Head of Service is well supported by the team of teachers. Together they present a consistent approach to the pupils and operate as a successful team. This pays off in terms of its positive impact on pupils' personal and academic development and on their standards of work.

55. The Pupil Referral Service has a good strategic plan and a good development plan, which identifies appropriate issues for development. The links to the budget plan are made clear. The LEA is in the process of developing its PRU provision within the framework of the wider work of the Service, in line with its longer-term strategic plan to support the drive for inclusion. As yet, the arrangements for monitoring the quality of teaching in the unit are too informal, and this is recognised as an area for development. However, the regular staff discussions about pupils' performance and the reviews of their progress, together with ongoing discussion about curriculum development in the unit, help managers evaluate what the unit is providing for individual pupils. The emphasis has yet to move to a more systematic review of the overall effectiveness of the quality of provision.

56. The Pupil Referral Service has a management committee, with terms of reference which are known and understood. The committee receives regular reports from the Head of Service, and takes seriously its policy-making and decision-making responsibilities. It has a responsibility for monitoring and evaluating the quality of provision of the Service and of individual units. This is at an early stage of development.

57. Through the attendance of the Head of Service at the management committee meetings, and through regular discussions between the LEA senior inspector and the Head of Service, the LEA is kept informed of both the unit's provision and of its planned development. The LEA inspectorate's work with the unit could be an effective strategy for monitoring and evaluating the quality of provision. As yet this has not happened. At this relatively early stage in the unit's development, the focus has been on providing support for setting up the unit rather than on monitoring the quality of the unit's work.

58. The LEA has a clear rationale for its PRU provision. Its admissions and referrals procedures are clear. However, the unit is not in a position to meet adequately the needs of pupils with statements of special educational needs in respect of emotional and behavioural difficulties who are nevertheless on its roll.

59. The Head of Service is currently also acting, on a temporary basis, as head of the unit and the LEA has plans to address this. This has been effective in setting up the unit, but the lack of a day-to-day manager on site has meant that some issues have not been picked up, for example the weakness in the teaching of PSHE. Furthermore, it has not been easy to identify and share best practice among staff, particularly in setting up and maintaining necessary systems, for example recording assessment and progress and keeping the pupils' daily logs up to date.

60. The unit's aims of increasing pupils' self-esteem, of preparing them to take their place in society and of retrieving their education are realised in the day-to-day life of the unit and in the interactions between teachers and pupils. A quiet, positive and supportive ethos permeates the unit and reflects its commitment to promoting pupils' self-esteem through success in learning and in personal development, and to providing an effective learning environment where good relationships and equality of opportunity for all pupils are consistent hallmarks.

61. The teachers' willingness to take on responsibilities has led to an effectively functioning unit. The dedication, skills, enthusiasm and expertise of teachers contribute to the success of the unit. The teachers have a good deal of experience and expertise in the sort of work involved in a unit such as the Launchpad Suite. This clearly works to the benefit of the pupils. The unit has sufficient, suitably qualified and experienced teachers for the number of pupils attending, but the allocation of the whole of the taught PSHE programme to an unqualified teacher is unsatisfactory.

62. The Head of Service makes good use of the flexibility she has to provide opportunities for pupils over and above their taught time in the unit, for example through college courses or projects run by external providers. The fruitful partnership the Service has with the further education college helps this arrangement to work effectively.

63. Statutory requirements for teacher appraisal have not been met. In other respects, there are sound arrangements for the professional development of staff. This is contributing to the success of curriculum developments and helps teachers in their work in the classroom.

64. The PRU is conveniently sited on the college campus. The accommodation is well organised and is used flexibly and effectively. The staff have created an attractive, business-like, working environment. A good deal of thought has been given to using the limited available space efficiently. The ICT room is well equipped and well used. However, there are significant shortcomings in the accommodation. It offers very limited space, having only three small teaching rooms and an office/staff room. There is no specialist area for teaching science (although there are plans to use college laboratories); there is no careers library; nor is there space to display books in an attractive way that would encourage wider interest in reading. Pupils have no suitable social area to encourage their personal development. There is no suitable space for individual interviews or counselling.

65. The unit has enough books, materials and equipment to teach the current curriculum. These are suitable, generally in good condition, and appropriate to the age and wide range of attainment of the pupils. Teachers make very good use of the resources available. Teachers

recognise that a wider range of resources will be needed for the developments planned in science. Whilst pupils have access to some up-to-date, attractive reading and reference books, the range needs to be extended further, and arrangements for their display and access to them need to be improved. The unit has a good number of computers, and these are well used, both to develop ICT capability and to help with work across the curriculum.

66. The Pupil Referral Service has clarified the basis for funding the PRU and for charging schools for its services. Arrangements for financial planning and management are secure, and support the Service development plans. The Service has established a rigorous system for monitoring on a monthly basis the hours provided for each pupil. This puts the Service in a good position to monitor the actual cost of provision and to fulfil its intention of checking whether best value is being achieved.

WHAT SHOULD THE UNIT DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

67. To build on what the unit does well and to improve things further, the LEA and the staff of the unit should:

1. **Improve the quality of teaching and learning in PSHE**, by:
 - making sure that those teaching the subject have the necessary expertise in the subject and in behaviour management;
 - improving the way PSHE work is planned;
 - developing methods that motivate pupils, engage them actively in their work, and encourage them to improve their understanding and skills;
 - helping teachers match work to pupils' identified needs;
 - ensuring that teaching is regularly monitored and action taken to deal with identified weaknesses.
(Paragraphs 3, 9, 27, 29, 36, 59, 61.)
2. **Whilst retaining its strong commitment to inclusion, seek ways to tackle the problem of longstanding non-attending pupils** who remain on the roll of the PRU yet who do not attend, and for whom the PRU is not proving to be the answer.
(Paragraphs 1, 10, 16, 32.)
3. **Seek alternative provision for pupils with statements of special educational needs for serious emotional and behavioural difficulties, for whom the PRU's current arrangements are not working.**
(Paragraph 33.)
4. **Improve the way pupils are allocated to vocational courses** (particularly when they join the PRU in the course of the year), to avoid delays in setting up a broad, balanced curriculum for them.
(Paragraphs 28, 30.)
5. **Improve the day-to-day management of the unit**, so that:
 - there is systematic monitoring and evaluation of teaching;
 - best practice is identified and shared among staff;
 - suitable appraisal/performance management procedures are in place;
 - systems are maintained and developed in a consistent way (including recording of assessment and progress; maintaining pupils' daily logs; quick response to pupils'

absences)
(Paragraphs 42, 43, 44, 47, 55, 57, 59, 63.)

6. **Improve the accommodation**, so that it is less cramped; there is a social area for pupils; and there is suitable accommodation for teaching science.
(Paragraphs 25, 38, 64.)
7. **Improve the planning of the ICT curriculum**, by pulling together the various elements of ICT provision in the PRU into a coherent programme, so that pupils can make better sense of what happens and understand what their learning objectives are.
(Paragraph 35.)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	35
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	25

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
0	18	58	13	3	3	5

The table gives the percentage of teaching observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons.

Information about the unit's pupils

Pupils on the unit's roll	No of pupils
Number of pupils on the unit's roll	33

Special educational needs	No of pupils
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	12
Number of pupils on the unit's special educational needs register	30

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	0

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
Unit data	8

Unauthorised absence

	%
Unit data	44

Both tables give the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for last whole term before the inspection

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	
Black – African heritage	
Black – other	
Indian	
Pakistani	
Bangladeshi	
Chinese	
White	33
Any other minority ethnic group	

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Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage		
Black – African heritage		
Black – other		
Indian		
Pakistani		
Bangladeshi		
Chinese		
White		
Other minority ethnic groups		

This table gives the number of exclusions, which may be different from the number of pupils excluded.

Teachers and classes**Qualified teachers and classes: Y10 – Y11**

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	2.2
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	N.A.

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y10 – Y11

Total number of education support staff	1
Total aggregate hours worked per week	37

Financial information

Financial year	1999-2000
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	£
Total income	61,354.00
Total expenditure	61,354.00
Expenditure per pupil	N.A.
Balance brought forward from previous year	N.A.
Balance carried forward to next year	-

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Summary of parents' and carers' responses

Parents believe that the unit makes a difference to their children and serves them well. Inspectors' findings support these positive views. Most pupils behave well but in a minority of lessons, when taught by an unqualified teacher, teaching fails to motivate and pupils' behaviour deteriorates. The unit works hard to involve parents and to keep them informed about their children's progress.