

INSPECTION REPORT

MOAT HOUSE PUPIL REFERRAL UNIT

Stockport, Cheshire

LEA area: Stockport

Unique reference number: 106023

Headteacher: Lynda S Gwyther

Reporting inspector: Alastair Younger
23587

Dates of inspection: 14th-16th May 2001

Inspection number: 235870

Full inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE UNIT

Type of school: Pregnant schoolgirls and young mothers

School category: Pupil referral unit

Age range of pupils: 15-17

Gender of pupils: Female

Unit address: 6 Lower Moat Close
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Appropriate authority: Stockport Local Education Authority

Name of responsible officer: Mr Chris Keeble

Date of previous inspection: March 1998

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE UNIT

This is a small pupil referral unit for pregnant schoolgirls and nursing mothers. It serves the town of Stockport and the surrounding area. Pupils are admitted at any time of the school year, usually within two weeks of their initial referral. There are places for up to 15 girls but there can be more on roll because not all will be attending at any one time. At present there are 16 girls on roll, all of them white and English speaking. Several are older than the statutory school leaving age but are repeating their final year because their pregnancies interrupted their education before they took their examinations last year. Assessment data from previous schools shows that there is a broad range of attainment on entry but that it has fallen for each of the last three years. At present, no pupils have special educational needs. The majority of pupils has been under-performing prior to their admission, often because of erratic attendance in previous schools. Attached to the unit is a crèche for the babies of pupils.

HOW GOOD THE UNIT IS

Moat House is an excellent unit. It has high expectations of staff and pupils and gives very good value for money. It has many strengths and no major weaknesses. The leadership and management of the headteacher and key staff is excellent as is teaching. This leads to pupils learning very well, making very good progress and achieving, and often exceeding, individual expectations. Pupils' attitudes are very good and their behaviour and personal development are excellent.

What the unit does well

- There is a great consistency of very high quality teaching, leading to pupils achieving very well in all subjects and often achieving several passes in externally accredited examinations.
- Pupils are a delight, they behave impeccably and are keen to learn. They develop into mature and responsible young mothers in a relatively short space of time.
- The standard of care is excellent. Moat House is a happy and safe place, where pupils can concentrate on learning, knowing that their babies are being given the highest possible standard of care in the nursery.
- The headteacher provides an excellent standard of leadership and management.

What could be improved

- The curriculum could be improved by increasing links with colleges of further higher education.

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

HOW THE UNIT HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

Every weakness identified by the previous inspection, in 1998, has been systematically and successfully addressed and there have also been improvements in areas previously described as good or very good. This represents very good improvement from an already high standard.

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 the time pupils leave	Key	
English	A	very good	A
mathematics	A	good	B
science	A	satisfactory	C
personal, social and health education	A	unsatisfactory	D
other personal targets set at annual reviews or in IEPs*	A	poor	E

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

Pupils achieve very well in every subject taught. This includes child care and information and communication technology. Nearly all girls gain passes in GCSE examinations in a limited range of subjects. Girls who have chosen options other than those that form the core of the unit curriculum are able to pursue their studies and in previous years have achieved a high degree of success in doing so. At present, there are no such pupils on roll.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the unit	Very good. Many girls have previously demonstrated negative attitudes to schooling but at the unit they participate fully and with a determination to succeed.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Excellent. Lessons proceed without incident. Pupils are polite and honest. There is no bullying and no sexist or racist comments are on record.
Personal development and relationships	Excellent. On entry, girls can be angry and confused and think poorly of themselves but by the time they leave they have invariably developed a sense of responsibility for themselves and their babies. To this, they have added qualifications and, often, a desire to further their education at college or find employment.
Attendance	When girls can attend, they nearly always do. Clinic appointments and confinements inevitably mean that overall attendance figures cannot match those in mainstream schools but nearly all girls greatly improve previous patterns of attendance, even when compared with the period before they became pregnant.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	
Lessons seen overall	Excellent

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.

There is a high degree of consistency in teaching. Of that observed, 17 per cent was excellent, 66 per cent very good and 17 per cent good. Every subject is very well taught and teachers show excellent skills in balancing the educational needs with the personal needs of pupils. This is one of the main reasons why pupils learn so well. In combination with the excellent subject knowledge of teachers, and planning of the highest quality, it results in lessons where pupils want to learn and are highly motivated to do so. Teachers have fully embraced the principles of national strategies to improve numeracy and literacy well ahead of any statutory requirement and teach both to a very high standard.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE UNIT

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Very good. The unit curriculum consists of a core containing the important subjects of English, mathematics, science, information and communication technology and child care. To this can be added any subject that a pupil has chosen to study as an option in Year 10 of mainstream school. Every pupil has the opportunity to attend short courses of a practical or vocational nature at college but there are limited opportunities for pupils to pursue extended college courses.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Very good. At present there are no such pupils but planning and policy for such an eventuality are in place. There is very good, regular testing and an educational psychologist makes frequent visits.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good. For pupils' moral and social education there is excellent provision; for their spiritual, very good and for their cultural good. Lack of art, music, the humanities and a modern foreign language weakens cultural provision but visits to theatres and galleries and occasional visits from speakers help to compensate.
How well the unit cares for its pupils	Excellent. In every respect the unit provides the highest quality care and support for pupils. Underpinning the success of the unit is a bank of carefully considered, comprehensive policies and procedures that shows the benefit of having been reviewed and refined over a long period of time. Pupils can concentrate on learning, knowing that their babies are being given the highest possible standard of care in the nursery.

The unit works closely with parents whenever possible. They are unanimously supportive and a huge number of parents of past pupils have voiced their thanks for the help given to their children. There is regular reporting of progress and parents are given very good information about what happens in the unit.

HOW WELL THE UNIT IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Excellent. The headteacher founded the unit almost 23 years ago and through her single mindedness has created an establishment that is held in the utmost esteem by all who come in contact with it. There has been excellent sharing of responsibility by all staff, each of whom has contributed to the full in ensuring that girls who come to the unit receive the best possible education.
How well the management committee fulfils its responsibilities	Good. This was an area of weakness at the last inspection but since then there has been greater involvement. At present, for instance, the committee is conducting an audit of staffing to determine whether an increase can be justified. The local education authority in its role of 'appropriate authority' has consistently offered a high degree of support to the unit.
The unit's evaluation of its performance	Excellent. There is extensive monitoring of teaching. The headteacher observes many lessons, either formally or informally, and there is very good, regular dialogue between herself and all staff to discuss pupils' progress, their own teaching and any information that could help them further improve their practice. Excellent attention is paid to setting relevant and realistic unit targets which are regularly reviewed.
The strategic use of resources	The unit manages only a small budget for the purchase of resources and day-to-day expenditure. It does this impeccably.

The building is immaculately maintained and kept in a high degree of repair. It provides a welcome and homely base for the unit. Its size and layout do, however, impose limitations. There is, for instance, no downstairs toilet or washroom and there is a lack of storage space for prams. The unit is generously staffed. Teachers have a very good range of relevant expertise in all the main subjects taught. The part-time nature of their contracts does, however, impose limitations on their deployment and this contributes to a shorter school day and limitations in the curriculum. The unit is very well resourced.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE UNIT

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Everything 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nothing

The inspection team thinks that the parents have got it right.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The unit's results and pupils' achievements

1. Pupils achieve very well. The main reason for achievement being very good despite teaching being excellent is that pupils miss a substantial number of lessons, albeit legitimately. None of the girls presently attending have special educational needs but many have previously been under performing, often because they have spent a lot of time out of school.

2. In almost every instance, time lost, either through pregnancy or childbirth, is made up for by teaching of the highest quality in small class groups. In addition to this, the unit is exceptionally successful in remedying many pupils' previously negative attitudes and generating a sense of hope and enthusiasm which augurs well, not only for the pupils, but also for the future of their children.

3. Careful attention is given to individual needs and precise targets are set for each girl. This represents a very good improvement since the previous inspection. Pupils leave the unit with a good range of externally accredited qualifications and a mature understanding of their responsibilities. Qualifications gained include GCSE in English, mathematics and science, AQA achievement certificates in numeracy and literacy, Basic Tests, Unit Awards and OCR CLAIT awards for information and communication technology. This prepares them well for the next stage of their education or for employment.

4. In English, pupils achieve very well, and make very good progress. This is an improvement since the previous inspection. Handwriting and general presentation are particularly good. This is especially so for the most able pupils. They write passages for a wide range of purposes, such as studies of the work of famous poets and authors from Britain and other cultures, as well as writing their own very good poems and stories. Pupils analyse the way that the English language can be used for different purposes, such as in poems, political manifestos, advertisements and war stories. They sensibly and sensitively discuss famous, and also less well known, novels, plays and poems. They look deeply into the meanings of such works, and try to see the motives of the characters as, for instance when studying John Steinbeck's "Of Mice and Men". Nearly all pupils read fluently, with good expression, especially when the text they are reading includes conversations between people of differing characters, such as in a Shakespeare play.

5. In mathematics, pupils achieve very well and make very good progress, an improvement since the previous inspection. Girls work towards a range of externally accredited qualifications including GCSE and achieve a high level of success. They understand the language of probability and generate 'tree diagrams' which they use to explain the likelihood of events happening in everyday life. Pupils show their improving understanding of geometry by calculating angles in a range of polygons. They show increasing confidence in their mathematical skill and, through improving their vocabulary, they are able to explain clearly what they are trying to do and describe difficulties that they are encountering. What is particularly good is the way girls relate what they are learning to real life situations.

6. Very high achievement in science represents a very good improvement since the previous inspection. Girls develop a very good understanding of the human body and the processes, such as respiration, reproduction and excretion, which characterise life. They make very good use of practical activities to demonstrate, for instance, the conditions needed for preserving food and preventing food poisoning. In a very good link with mathematics and

information and communication technology, pupils are transferring data from tables to graphs and using these to illustrate their findings on the nutrients found in different foods.

7. Achievement in childcare is very good. Pupils undertake an individual child study in addition to a range of other activities including research and collection of data. Pupils work together well and share the outcomes of an investigation into benefits of different kinds of early years' provision such as nurseries and playgroups. They understand the need to prepare young children for school and the skills that they need to learn. It is clear from pupils' response to questioning and in discussion that the subject has a significant impact on the development of their own parenting skills. The childcare course is also contributing very well to achievement in other areas of the curriculum. For instance, girls have completed practical projects in the design of toys or games, analysing their suitability for different age groups. They have also made items of clothing, designed friezes for a baby's bedroom and cooked meals for themselves and their infants.

8. In information and communication technology, pupils achieve very well. This represents a very good improvement since the previous inspection. Particularly good skills are developed in word processing. Pupils manipulate text and change fonts and styles of presentation, such as altering the layout of documents for different purposes such as letters, memos, reports, poems and stories. They bring illustration into their work, and present it well. They learn to create and make use of spreadsheets and databases in straightforward ways, and they regularly use their skills in other lessons such as mathematics and science. Pupils obtain information from CD ROMs and from the Internet for projects that they are undertaking. All of this valuable work is part of the externally accredited study programmes. It is very much oriented towards gaining recognised qualifications but leaves little time to expand pupils' learning into other uses of computers, especially the aesthetic areas, such as art and music.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

9. There has been a good improvement from an already high standard since the last report.

10. Pupils have very good attitudes towards learning. Those who attend regularly are keen and very attentive in their lessons, and this is a great aid to their learning. It makes for pleasant and positive relationships. They are attentive when teachers are explaining or demonstrating, and they discuss matters sensibly. They concentrate very well and for significant periods of time enabling them, for instance, to complete extended pieces of written work or read long and complicated passages in English lessons. A lot of self-motivation is evident in the manner in which they revise conscientiously for examinations. Occasionally, pupils are studious rather than enthusiastic. In a science lesson, for instance, they worked well but it was the teacher's skill rather than the pupils' keenness that brought about the very good progress seen.

11. Pupils' behaviour is excellent; swearing is unheard of and there is no misbehaviour or rudeness, whether staff are close by or not. The girls get on very well with one another and with staff; they support each other over matters of mutual interest, such as their babies, travel, homes and housing difficulties. Pupils are sensitive in their behaviour to each other, and treat newcomers very well, helping with problems and anxiety with the reassurance that they have all 'been there'.

12. Feelings, hopes and fears are discussed freely, whether in planned lessons, or spontaneously when an occasion arises. Personal development is excellent, particularly in enabling pupils to assume responsibility for themselves and their babies. Pupils concentrate on their futures as well as their work and discuss their possible moves to college or work when they leave Moat House. Pupils often enter the unit scared, confused and occasionally angry. Nearly all leave it as more mature and young adults with a clear view of their responsibilities and the skills to fulfil them.

13. Many pupils had poor or erratic attendance at their previous schools, but nearly all attend the unit with greater regularity. With each pupil representing about five per cent of the total, it can be seen that attendance figures will fluctuate widely. Reasons for absence include illness (their own and their baby's), routine medical appointments and maternity leave. These all contribute to an absence rate of about 40 per cent, well in excess of the desired figure for mainstream schools but realistic for a unit such as this. This year, no absence has been recorded as unauthorised but teachers have commented in progress reviews that a small minority of pupils are still not attending as regularly as they should.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

14. There is an exceptionally high standard of teaching. It has improved from an already high standard. The inspection coincided with the run up to GCSE's, with teaching focussing upon revision; even so, of that observed, 17 per cent was excellent, 66 per cent very good and 17 per cent good. Analysis of pupils' work and teachers' records supports the view that teaching is often even better when teachers are freed of the restrictions of revision.

15. There are virtually no weaknesses evident in most of the teaching. Teachers show excellent skills in balancing the educational needs with the personal needs of pupils. This is one of the main reasons why pupils learn so well. In combination with the excellent subject knowledge of teachers, and planning of the highest quality, it results in lessons which are made interesting and where pupils want to learn and are highly motivated to do so. All work is sensitively and accurately marked, giving pupils an excellent feedback as to what they have achieved and where they could make improvements. Teachers have fully embraced the principles of national strategies to improve numeracy and literacy well ahead of any statutory requirement and teach both to a very high standard. Homework is always set and it is marked and discussed on return. This has the effect of compensating for the short unit day and developing individual responsibility for learning.

16. Teaching and learning in English are very good. Planning is excellent and so is the assessment of pupils' progress, from verbal feedback in lessons, to detailed and analytical marking which allows the teacher to shape future lessons exactly to the needs of individual pupils. The teacher has excellent knowledge of the subject and of the pupils, and she has a warm and positive approach that the pupils find very motivating. This enables the lessons to proceed at a very good pace, with challenging tasks for pupils who may be working at different levels and on different courses within the same lesson. Pupils' excellent attitude and behaviour contribute very well to their learning, as they are keen and very attentive, whatever the lesson is about, even when revising for imminent exams.

17. In mathematics, the teacher's excellent subject knowledge is demonstrated in the well targeted questioning which supports and develops pupils' mathematical understanding. Lessons are very well structured, beginning with a short revision activity and ending with a review of the work done. This structure reflects that of the National Numeracy Strategy. Numeracy is planned throughout all areas of the curriculum and links between subjects are recognised and developed.

18. Science is exceptionally well taught. The teacher has extensive subject knowledge and uses marking and annotation particularly well to help pupils make progress. For instance, in a test when a pupil arrived at the wrong answer, the teacher took time to explain that whilst the answer was a correct interpretation of one graph it was the wrong graph. The pupil was thus made aware of a simple mistake and was encouraged to correct herself. Very good use is being made of computers, especially for accessing the Internet. This adds interest to lessons and provides an invaluable resource. Excellent links to other subjects are identified in planning, contributing to lessons which are packed with useful and interesting information, often linked closely to childcare or personal, social and health education.

19. Teaching and learning in information and communication technology are very good. Lesson planning is detailed and practical, and is closely based on the very good long-term planning that depends on the teacher's high level of subject knowledge. The result is that pupils learn very well, being highly motivated and concentrating fully in lessons, whether listening to the teacher or doing their own work on the computers. Pupils are generally determined to try to sort out their difficulties when trying something new, but they are willing to ask for support when necessary. The teacher sets ever more challenging tasks, encouraging the pupils to produce, for example, more complex documents, better layouts, or different styles of print. Relationships in computer-related lessons are very good; they are warm and positive, helping pupils to learn at a very good pace.

20. The excellent teaching of childcare is based on extensive subject knowledge and the development of a multitude of well developed cross-curricular links. In addition to consistently strong teaching in lessons, pupils benefit from the high quality input of a very good range of professionals. The very close connection between the girls' own experiences and the curriculum contributes to the level of interest and the high quality of pupils' work.

21. At present, no other subjects are being taught. However, results from previous years, teachers' records, schemes of work and policy documents all point to the conclusion that teachers bring the same skills to every subject they are asked to teach.

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

22. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. The high standards reported then have been maintained and further developments undertaken. The curriculum is very good overall. It is well balanced and particularly relevant to the girls currently attending. There is an excellent focus on English, mathematics, science and information and communications technology. To these is added the very appropriate child care course. Aesthetic subjects, such as art and music, and the humanities, including geography and history, are not formally timetabled. Pupils are, however, taught elements of these subjects in their other studies and, if any girl has chosen such subjects as an option in her previous school, arrangements are made to allow her to continue her studies. Physical exercise is limited to pre and post-natal exercise and occasionally swimming, entirely appropriate in the circumstances. All pupils share a high degree of opportunity but the curriculum, especially for lower attaining pupils, who are gradually increasing in number, is weakened by limitations in the range of extended college courses of a practical or vocational nature.

23. On admission, a thorough discussion of individual needs takes place. Alongside initial testing of ability, information from previous schools informs the development of individual programmes. Where possible, pupils continue with options chosen in their previous schools. The unit provides an appropriate central curriculum of English, mathematics, science, information and communication technology and child care. Provision for additional subjects is negotiated through close liaison with mainstream schools. Wherever possible, pupils are

entered for GCSE. A good range of other externally accredited courses is provided, ensuring that all pupils leave the unit with recognised qualifications. All courses are kept under constant review to ensure that they represent the needs and abilities of pupils.

24. Policy and planning for each subject is consistently detailed and of a very high standard. Clear links between subjects are very well established to make the best possible use of time for learning. Within the subjects taught, very good opportunities are taken to recognise where they can contribute to subjects not formally taught. For instance, a childcare project on the appropriateness of different forms of baby clothing included many elements of evaluation as found in design and technology; likewise, a science lesson about disease transmission covered many aspects of Victorian social history.

25. Numeracy and literacy are highlighted in all subject areas and opportunities are taken to support individual development of these basic skills. Personal and social education has a high profile and is woven into all activities. There are clear, planned programmes for sex education and drugs awareness. Staff from other agencies regularly contribute to this programme and pupils and staff value and benefit from their input. The on-site nursery contributes significantly to pupils' personal and social education through the enhancement of self-esteem and the excellent childcare role models provided by nursery staff.

26. Careers' education and work-related learning is of very good quality. An enthusiastic careers' officer works alongside teaching staff to deliver an appropriate and relevant course, well in excess of statutory requirements. Activities during the course include visits to local colleges and employers. All pupils attend a short, part-time vocational course at college. Providing work experience is often problematic for nursing mothers but it is provided whenever possible and carefully planned to meet individual needs.

27. Extra-curricular activities are planned for after the completion of external examinations when mainstream pupils would expect to be on study leave. These activities help to enrich the curriculum and bring to the girls a valuable range of experiences that they would be unlikely to engage in on their own. In the past, pupils have participated in a wide range of visits and activities such as horse riding, swimming and cookery. There is a programme of visitors to the unit which includes an artist and a poet. Visits to places such as Chester Zoo and a walk in the Dales are also well documented.

28. The unit has developed constructive links with partner institutions and the local community. 'Planned Intervention to Prevent Exclusion' (PIPE) and 'Young Parents into Education' projects provide invaluable funds to broaden the curriculum within the unit and to assist leavers to continue in education. Pupils have supported a local hospice. Regular visitors include health visitors and a school nurse. Links with mainstream schools, the educational psychologist and welfare officers are excellent. Those with the local college are strong but limited by financial and childcare considerations.

29. The unit day is short in order to take into account the extra responsibilities of many pupils this is realistic. However, a longer school day would allow more flexibility in timetabling and the possible increase of subjects offered without necessarily compromising these responsibilities. Current hours of attendance include both lunchtimes and breaks. The girls use these times constructively to play with and care for their babies and they form an invaluable part of the unit day. At the moment, the school does not have any pupils who do not speak English as their home language and there have been very few in the past. Nevertheless, should the need arise, the provision, organised through the local education authority, is very good.

30. There is excellent provision for pupils' social and moral development. Pupils take part

in many discussions about their circumstances, or discuss issues which have a wider relevance in current affairs. Many opportunities are created, and taken, to encourage them to think about the rights and wrongs of different situations, and the many occasions when there is no right or wrong. Pupils are encouraged to help charities and made a recent donation to a children's hospice in the area. There are regular opportunities for pupils to mix socially, such as in the 'family lunches' twice a week, on visits to local shops at midday and on trips out of school. With their own babies being so close at hand within the unit, there are very good opportunities for them to develop a sense of personal responsibility. A professional acting group will visit the school later in the year to work with the pupils on writing a play about the lives of teenage mothers.

31. Very good opportunities are created to encourage pupils' spiritual development. The study of plays such as 'Romeo and Juliet' and prose such as Thomas Hardy's 'Tony Kytes', in English literature lessons contribute valuably to pupils' spiritual and personal awareness. At other times, pupils are encouraged to reflect on their lives, their futures, and the futures of their newborn babies. There are celebrations and congratulations for pupils on the birth of their babies, on birthdays and for wider festivals such as Christmas and Easter.

32. The good provision for cultural development centres on occasional visiting artists and poets, and visits to the theatre and art galleries, rather than regular, planned provision within the timetable. The study of poetry from other cultures, and a range of art posters on display adds to pupils' awareness of other cultures. Celebrations of the Chinese New Year, a Chinese banquet and a visitor who demonstrated some Indian clothes and customs have added to pupils' awareness of other cultures. Such occasions are very good, but do not wholly make up for the lack of direct and regular teaching of, for instance, history, geography, a foreign language, art and music, that could contribute to raising pupils' awareness of their own culture, and of other cultures.

HOW WELL DOES THE UNIT CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

33. Staff treat pupils with courtesy, kindness and respect, and pupils respond with hard work and exemplary behaviour. The unit succeeds in achieving its mission to establish a safe and happy environment in which everyone is encouraged and supported in developing their maximum potential. The welfare of pupils and their babies is paramount, and standards of care are excellent. Nursery staff encourage mothers to take full responsibility for their children, and respect their wishes. They provide helpful advice, reassuring support and first-class guidance for children's early learning. The nursery provision has a crucial role in raising mothers' self-confidence and helping them to develop strong parenting skills.

34. The headteacher is very effective in mustering the help of many external agencies to provide solutions to the practical problems of accommodation and finance which significant numbers of pupils face. Procedures for child protection are clear and well understood by everyone. Staff pay very good attention to health and safety. Fire notices are clear, pupils take appropriate safety precautions in lessons, for example wearing goggles for science experiments, and the premises are well maintained, clean and tidy.

35. The assessment deficiencies noted in the 1998 inspection report have been corrected. Assessments of pupils' educational progress focus on progress towards target examination grades. This supports the unit's educational objective for pupils to leave with GCSEs and other qualifications which give them access to further education and widen their career opportunities. Pupils agree targets, and review their progress in termly discussions with the headteacher. Targets focus on the skills, knowledge and understanding pupils need for their GCSE and other courses. Records of Achievement highlight pupils' academic attainments and personal development. Teachers use their assessments of each pupil's

work to devise individual plans, which they constantly monitor and revise. Teachers' rapid use of assessment, focusing on strengths and weaknesses in the work of each pupil, makes a big contribution to the timely and constructive educational guidance which the unit provides. The new report format reduces the scope for pupils to formally express their own views of their progress and new targets but they do have good opportunities to talk about these in reviews.

36. Summer leavers return before Christmas for a certificate presentation ceremony when their achievements are praised and all of their babies receive a record of achievement from the nursery. Staff encourage leavers to keep in contact with the unit for as long as they need. This continuing care – beyond the official remit for the unit – is a major strength.

37. Procedures for improving attendance are very good. They include individual targets, a telephone call on the first morning of unexplained absence, a home visit if the telephone call is unanswered, and praise, rewards and certificates for improved attendance. This year, all absence has been recorded as authorised but there is evidence that, occasionally, pupils could attend but choose not to. This suggests that there is scope for improving criteria for distinguishing authorised from unauthorised absence.

HOW WELL DOES THE UNIT WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

38. Partnership with parents is very good overall. Parents give the highest praise to the unit, and inspection supports their judgement. They receive termly reviews of their child's progress in all subjects, with targets for the next term, and an annual report which focuses on their child's achievements. Parents of new pupils receive an informative brochure, and a three-way agreement between pupils, parents and the unit ensures that all have a clear summary of their rights and responsibilities. The unit produces a colourful weekly newsletter which pupils are able to take home. Staff accomplish with sensitivity and understanding the demanding task of communicating effectively with parents and other influential people in the lives of pupils who are themselves mothers or pregnant. A large number of parents of past pupils have recorded their thanks for the help the unit has offered their children.

HOW WELL IS THE UNIT LED AND MANAGED?

39. Minor weaknesses in leadership and management identified by the previous inspection have been systematically and effectively addressed.

40. The strong leadership of the headteacher remains the driving force behind the success of the unit. She founded the unit almost 23 years ago and through her single mindedness and crystal clear vision has created an establishment that is held in great esteem by all who come in contact with it and which pursues the highest possible academic standards. All staff bear a large range of responsibilities with the utmost professionalism. This results in a unified team which provides leadership and management of the highest quality.

41. An area of weakness at the last inspection concerned the lack of identification of an appropriate role for the management committee. This has been remedied and there is now greater involvement. At present, for instance, the committee is conducting an audit of staffing to determine whether an increase can be justified. The committee is kept well informed about the achievements of the unit because the headteacher produces very high quality, termly reports for them. A weakness of the management committee is that its membership is predominantly local education authority employees rather than representatives of the broader community, as envisaged by the Department for Education and Employment in its circular for social inclusion and pupil support (10/99).

42. The local education authority in its role as 'appropriate authority' has consistently offered a high degree of support to the unit. It ensures that the unit is generously funded and that it has access to all services available to mainstream schools. The responsible officer recognises the headteacher's strengths in developing and managing the unit and has also, very importantly, identified the need for greater involvement in the authority's drive for greater inclusion through further development of the service that the unit can offer schools.

43. There is extensive monitoring of teaching. The headteacher is rarely out of the main classroom and observes lessons formally and informally. Very good, regular dialogue between herself and all staff focuses on individual progress and helps address problems being encountered. Successful teaching strategies are shared. Excellent attention is paid to setting relevant and realistic individual and unit targets and these are regularly reviewed. In a particularly strong initiative, the unit uses the services of a local university to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of curriculum enhancement projects in which it is involved.

44. There are very clear priorities for development. Having addressed weaknesses identified by the previous inspection the headteacher is now endeavouring to improve the accommodation and resolve staffing issues. The unit is extending the range of external accreditation for final year pupils to include new opportunities, especially for lower attaining pupils. Where there is a weakness is that all the priorities for development relate to provision within the unit. A broader vision would include the further development of the service that can also be offered and the enhancement of the curriculum through more, longer term, courses in college.

45. The unit is generously staffed for the number of pupils on roll and the length of the unit day. Teachers are very well qualified and excellently suited to their role. Their expertise has been very well enhanced by training, including recent initiatives such as the National Literacy and Numeracy projects. An excellent induction programme supports new staff in their early weeks at the unit, and they quickly feel part of a team, with all of the mutual support that this involves. The school is also very well supported by:

- the members of the nursery staff who look after the pupils' babies so well, allowing girls to go to lessons assured that their babies are getting the best of attention;
- the secretary who produces so much high quality display work as well as managing the routine administration of the unit to an exceptional standard;
- the caretaker who is constantly busy, supporting the staff, the pupils and their babies, and maintaining the highest standard of cleanliness throughout the building;
- many visiting specialists, education officials, therapists and nurses.

46. The accommodation is good. It includes a secluded and peaceful garden in which pupils and their babies can relax. Classrooms are bright and well adapted to the needs of the unit. The compact science area in the main classroom makes a significant contribution to the success of pupils in the subject. A kitchen area doubles as a communal space and classroom and there is a small, well appointed nursery. However, the size of the building is a limitation, the nursery is cramped, there are no downstairs toilets or wash facilities and there is no storage space for buggies.

47. There are very good resources to help pupils with their learning, especially in English, mathematics, science, information and communication technology, child care, personal development, and careers. Texts to support externally accredited coursework are particularly good. Resources are of good quality and are easily accessible to all members of staff.

48. Areas of improvement since the last inspection are the appointment of a secretary, where there was none before; and the upgrading of the computers and the computer room, where the previous facilities were very old and unsuitable.

49. The part-time nature of teachers' contracts imposes limitations on the efficiency of their deployment. This contributes to a shorter school day and limitations in the curriculum. The unit manages only a small budget for the purchase of resources and day-to-day expenditure. It does this impeccably, carefully considering areas of need and spending wisely. The unit is generously funded and achieves a huge degree of success in everything it does. Newly admitted pupils are often angry, confused and scared girls; on leaving, most have good qualifications and optimism for the future. The unit gives very good value for money.

WHAT SHOULD THE UNIT DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

50. Although the unit is excellent there is one important point that the headteacher, local education authority and management committee should now consider in order to maintain this status in the light of evidence that suggests that attainment on entry is falling:

- The curriculum should be further strengthened by increasing opportunities for pupils to undertake extended courses in colleges of education. At present the curriculum focuses strongly on academic achievement and this has been entirely appropriate. What is needed is a stronger contingency for the provision of more practical or vocationally based courses for the projected increase of numbers of lower attaining pupils. (paragraphs 22,28, 44)

In addition to the main issue, the management may wish to consider the following minor weaknesses in its action plan for improvement:

- extending the taught day (paragraph29)
- limitations in the accommodation (paragraph 46)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	12
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	20

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
20	60	20	0	0	0	0

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	16

Special educational needs	No of pupils
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	0
Number of pupils on the unit's special educational needs register	0

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

Attendance

Authorised absence	%
Unit data	40

Unauthorised absence	%
Unit data	0

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	0
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	0
Indian	0
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	0
White	16
Any other minority ethnic group	0

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	0	0
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

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)	3.0
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	5

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y10 – Y11

Total number of education support staff	0
Total aggregate hours worked per week	0

Financial information

In common with most pupil referral units the budget is held centrally and administered through the local education authority. There is currently no facility to carry funding forward.

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Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	16
Number of questionnaires returned	11

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	91	9	0	0	0
My child is making good progress in school.	100	0	0	0	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	100	0	0	0	0
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	91	9	0	0	0
The teaching is good.	100	0	0	0	0
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	100	0	0	0	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	100	0	0	0	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	91	9	0	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	91	9	0	0	0
The school is well led and managed.	100	0	0	0	0
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	100	0	0	0	0
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	82	18	0	0	0