

INSPECTION REPORT

THE MERITON CENTRE

Meriton Street, St. Philips, Bristol

LEA area: Bristol

Unique reference number: 108908

Headteacher: Carol Bowery

Reporting inspector: Peter Johnson
2925

Dates of inspection: 13th – 15th May 2003

Inspection number: 249500

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE UNIT

Type of school:

School category: Pupil Referral Unit

Age range of pupils: 13 – 23

Gender of pupils: Female

Unit address: Meriton Street
St, Philips
Bristol

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Appropriate authority: Bristol

Name of responsible officer: Jeanette Veira

Date of previous inspection: November 16th 1998

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
2925	Peter Johnson	Registered inspector	Mathematics, History, Modern Foreign Languages, Music, Religious Education, Educational Inclusion, Special Education Needs	The school's results and achievements; How well are pupils taught? How well is the school led and managed? What should the school do to improve further?
11575	Catherine Fish	Lay inspector		Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development; How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
1358	Glyn Essex	Team inspector	English, Science, Information and Communication Technology, Art and Design, Design and Technology	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?
1964	Patrick Playfair	Team inspector	Geography, Physical Education, English as an Additional Language	How well does the school care for its pupils?

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REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	6 – 9
Information about the unit	
How good the unit is	
What the unit does well	
What could be improved	
How the unit has improved since its last inspection	
Standards	
Pupils' attitudes and values	
Teaching and learning	
Other aspects of the unit	
How well the unit is led and managed	
Parents' and carers' views of the unit	
PART B: COMMENTARY	
HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?	10 – 14
The unit's results and pupils' achievements	
Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development	
HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?	14 – 17
HOW GOOD ARE THE CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO PUPILS OR STUDENTS?	17 – 19
HOW WELL DOES THE UNIT CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?	19 – 20
HOW WELL DOES THE UNIT WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS	20 – 21
HOW WELL IS THE UNIT LED AND MANAGED?	21 – 23
WHAT SHOULD THE UNIT DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?	24
PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS	25 – 29

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE UNIT

The Meriton is a pupil referral unit that provides education and support for young mothers aged from 13 to 23, although priority is given to those of statutory school age. The number of young women on roll has increased since the last inspection and the centre is now located in new, purpose built accommodation, which includes a nursery for the young women's children. Currently there are 54 young women on roll. Twenty-seven are dual registered with a mainstream school, are aged between 15 and 16 years and attend the centre full-time. The centre provides post-16 education for 27 young women on a part-time basis. Almost all the young women have experienced fractured formal schooling and therefore, on entry to the centre, have attained standards below those of young women of a similar age. The ethnic diversity of the centre has increased since the last inspection and now, almost a third of young women are of black or mixed-race heritage, two of whom are at the early stages of acquiring English as an additional language. Seven young women (13 per cent) have special educational needs (SEN), one of whom has a statement of SEN issued by the local education authority.

HOW GOOD THE UNIT IS

This is an outstanding pupil referral unit, which achieves excellence in almost all its work. It is an inclusive community, which aspires to make a difference to the lives of the young women it serves. It is extraordinarily successful and for this reason brings joy and fun back into their lives. Students and staff flourish in an atmosphere of mutual confidence, respect and trust. The value placed on the rights and worth of each individual is at the heart of the centre's success. The young women achieve very well in all aspects of their academic and personal development; their attitudes to work improve remarkably because the teaching they receive is of a consistently high quality and the curriculum and care provided for them and their children is exceptional. Leadership by the headteacher is outstanding and all staff contribute to the excellent management of the centre. The headteacher inspires the staff, students and members of the wider community to work together to the benefit all. The centre enables young women to lift their heads, to take a justified pride in their achievements and to regain their sense of worth and ambition; it helps them realise that they can determine their own future and be successful. It provides excellent value for money.

What the unit does well

- Ensures the young women's visibility in the community and promotes their inclusion in learning and life
- restores the confidence, self-respect and dignity of the young women
- sets the highest expectations for students and enables them to succeed
- ensures that young women achieve the highest grades of which they are capable in GCSE and A level
- provides consistently high quality teaching in all subjects
- has a curriculum which captivates students' interests and meets their academic, personal and social needs exceptionally well
- provides outstanding care for students and their children
- enjoys the excellent and inspirational leadership of a headteacher who is passionate in her quest for the very highest quality in everything that is provided for and achieved by the staff and students of the centre.

What could be improved

- the support provided by the Local Education Authority (LEA) to assist the centre to improve the attendance of young women and the learning of those who are in the earliest stages of acquiring English as an additional language.

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

The centre has made very good improvement since it was last inspected in 1998. Almost all aspects of its work are now much better than even the all round good quality reported at that time. Standards are higher, teaching is better and students respond better to the opportunities provided for them. Because the care provided for young women is much improved, their personal development is now more assured. The leadership of the headteacher, considered strong in 1998, is now outstanding. Almost all the issues identified for improvement by the centre have been attended to very effectively. The attendance of a minority of young women, however, remains a problem. Although the centre has done all it can to strengthen procedures to improve attendance, the LEA has been too slow to respond to the requirement placed on it by the last report. The LEA has only recently provided educational welfare support, but, despite the best efforts of the officer, insufficient time has been allocated to make a real difference. In addition, the reluctance of another LEA department to provide flexible and timely support to an innovative staff appointment has further impeded the improvement of student's attendance.

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 & post 16	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

Students achieve very well in all subjects and the standard of their work is very good, which enables them to achieve very well in GCSE and other examinations. They are competent and confident in the use of all aspects of ICT. Achievement in art, particularly at advanced level, is very high; in this subject and in child development, many young women achieve standards that are in line with students the same age nationally. They enjoy and achieve well in keep fit lessons, dance and drama. Their achievement in design and technology and in the wider, vocational curriculum, such as animation and motor vehicle mechanics is very good.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the unit	Excellent. The young women are highly motivated. They manage the demands of combining motherhood and education in an exemplary manner. They understand fully the importance of learning and grasp the opportunities provided by the centre with enthusiasm and determination.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Excellent. The young women demonstrate maturity and responsibility in all aspects of their behaviour. They are courteous, welcoming and trustworthy.
Personal development and relationships	Excellent. The centre is one big happy family where each member, both staff and students, express confidence in one another. Relationships throughout this community are excellent. Both staff and students are respectful of each other's values, beliefs and opinions.
Attendance	Unsatisfactory. The high levels of authorised absence are related to the

	young women's pregnancy, maternity leave and post-natal care. The poor attendance of a very few students has a negative effect on the overall attendance figures.
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Students' attitudes to work, to each other and to adults improve remarkably during their time in the centre. The improvement is such that there is a growing number who stay on after the age of 16, either to improve their achievements at GCSE or to further their studies to advanced level. A small number of students have progressed to higher education as a result of attending the centre. The behaviour and personal development of the young women are excellent because they enjoy such high levels of support and exemplary care by staff. Although the LEA now provides effective support for attendance it is not sufficient to make a difference to those young women who find regular attendance very difficult.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	
Lessons seen overall	Very good

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 is very good in English, mathematics, science and personal, social and health education. It is also very good in art and child development. The skills of literacy and numeracy are taught well but there is room for improvement to reach the high standards of teaching found in other subjects. Teachers' expectations set for their students, the effectiveness of the methods they use and their management of students are excellent. Teachers' knowledge and understanding of their subjects is very good and is excellent in the teaching of advanced level subjects. There are no weaknesses in teaching. As a result of this high quality, students' learning is very good; they work extremely hard and have an excellent understanding of the need for learning and recognise its importance in their lives. Consequently they make very good progress in all subjects. The centre tries very hard to meet the needs of all students and is very largely successful, but it needs more help from the LEA to meet those of students who are in the earliest stage of acquiring English as an additional language.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE UNIT

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Very good. The centre has used great flexibility and imagination to create a curriculum that is rich, varied and extremely relevant to the needs and interests of the young women.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Very good. Students with SEN achieve very well, because the high quality of teaching and care they receive helps them to raise their aspirations.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Unsatisfactory. Although the centre understands and responds as best as it can to the needs of these young women it lacks sufficient support from the LEA.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Excellent. The centre restores students' confidence, self-esteem and dignity. Provision for their moral and social development is excellent and that for their spiritual and cultural development is very good.
How well the unit cares for its pupils	Very good. The procedures for child protection and for ensuring students' welfare are very good. The personal support and guidance provided for them is excellent as is the care provided for their children in the nursery.

The centre provides an exceptionally rich diet of opportunities for young women to study and achieve well at many levels, including GCSE and A level. It enables students with SEN to achieve very well but they would benefit from a more detailed assessment of their progress and improved provision to meet their literacy and numeracy needs. The LEA does not provide sufficient support for the centre to meet the needs of students in the earliest stages of learning English as an additional language. The educational and personal support provided is excellent. For many of the young women the centre is a lifeline; it enables them to adjust to the change in their lives and prepares them well for motherhood. The centre goes to great lengths to ensure that the young women raise their aspirations for themselves and their children. The planning to assist them to realise these new aspirations is very good. The centre has established effective partnerships with the young women's parents.

HOW WELL THE UNIT IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Excellent. Management is a collaborative venture inspired by the outstanding leadership of the headteacher, which results in a centre that aspires to and achieves the highest of standards in almost all that it does.
How well the management committee fulfils its responsibilities	Excellent. The steering group is involved fully in the life of the centre. It knows the strengths and weaknesses of the centre very well and plays a key role in shaping the agenda for improvement.
The unit's evaluation of its performance	Excellent. The centre monitors carefully all aspects of its performance, evaluates rigorously the evidence it collects and takes very effective action to secure improvement.
The strategic use of resources	Excellent. The centre uses its devolved budget to the very best effect. The acquisition and deployment of expertise and resources ensure that students' enjoy a rich curriculum and achieve high standards.

The recruitment, induction and deployment of staff are particular strengths of the centre. The skills and expertise of members of the staff team are complementary so that students are provided with an imaginative and highly motivating curriculum. All staff provide exceptional role models for the young women. The new accommodation and the quality and range of books, resources and equipment are very good. The headteacher provides an outstanding role model through her passionate commitment to the achievement of high standards and quality. She inspires staff to seek continuous improvement to the high standards they already achieve and she is a tireless advocate for the centre, its staff and the young women they serve. Management at all levels is excellent and administration is smooth and efficient. The centre makes best possible use of its resources. The application of the principles of best value is exemplary. The commitment to improve still further and the capacity to do so are excellent.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE UNIT

The majority of parents agree that their daughters like attending the centre, that the centre expects them to work hard and to achieve their best and that they make good progress. They consider that the teaching is good and that they are comfortable approaching the unit with questions or a problem. In addition there is strong agreement that the unit is well led and managed and that it treats their daughters as young adults. Parents believe that the centre helps their daughters to raise their expectations of themselves and to aspire to further or higher education. They believe that the centre restores their confidence and puts fun back into their lives. Inspectors whole heartedly endorse the high regard in which parents hold the centre and its staff.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The unit's results and pupils' achievements

1. The achievement of the young women and the progress they make has improved since the last inspection. At that time standards were judged to be at least satisfactory and good in some subjects. Achievement is now at least good in all subjects and very good in most.

2. Students enter the centre with low levels of attainment in all subjects, often having missed significant periods of education. Although the attainment of most remains below that which would be expected of students of the same ages nationally, they make very good progress and achieve very well during the time they spend in the unit. So much so that in mathematics, art and child development, a number of students attain standards that are in line with those the same age nationally.

3. Achievement is very good for the great majority of young women. Higher and lower attainers make very good progress against their prior attainment. Despite the improvement needed to traditionally formal structures such as individual education plans, the achievement and progress of pupils with SEN is very good because they are taught very well and they develop strong motivation to succeed. Young women who are learning English as an additional language (EAL), but have some spoken English, are ably supported by the staff of the centre and make good progress. However, one young woman new to both the centre and the country is in the very earliest stages of learning English and there is insufficient support from the LEA service for such students to assist the staff in teaching her.

4. The centre's record in helping young women to achieve examination success is outstanding. Students' achievement in the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) in 2002 was remarkable given their personal circumstances and the amount of education that most had missed. Twenty-four students were entered for examinations in a range of subjects. Of these, almost all, 96 per cent, achieved 1+ A* - G, 50 per cent achieved at 3+ A* - G and 12 per cent achieved 5+ A* - G. Two students achieved a graded result in AS level art and one student achieved grade D in A level art. Nine students Entry Level certificates in either English, mathematics or information and communication technology (ICT) and eight students were awarded the National Skills Profile in Motor Vehicle studies. In both 2000 and 2001, young women attending the centre achieved similarly very good results. This picture of success is testimony to the way in which the centre has helped the young women to raise their aspirations and to the young women's determination to succeed in the face of considerable barriers.

English

5. Achievement in English is very good. There is a very broad range of attainment, particularly in reading among students new to the centre, but they make rapid progress in all aspects of the subject. The development of their speaking and listening skills benefit greatly from the excellent relationships which exist in the centre. The increase in the maturity and confidence with which they express themselves, in both formal and informal contexts, is particularly noticeable. In reading, their response to and understanding of literacy texts also show very good improvement and this is much in evidence in their coursework for Certificate of Achievement, GCSE and Advanced (supplementary) qualifications. They produce writing for a wide range of different purposes. They take a pride in this work and their growing ability

to draft, revise and edit their writing is reflected in the very good presentation of coursework, not only in English but in other subjects of the curriculum.

Mathematics

6. Students' very good achievement in mathematics is symptomatic of the way in which the centre changes young women's lives. Most enter the centre with low attainment and poor attitudes to the subject because of their fractured schooling and consequently they have considerable gaps in their mathematical knowledge. However, teaching of the subject makes rapid changes to both their achievement and their attitudes. While many still profess not to like the subject, they concentrate fiercely during lessons and all show a steely determination to achieve well in GCSE.

7. In 2002, 18 students were entered for GCSE and of these all achieved at least grade G, seven achieved grade D and one student was awarded grade B. This pattern of strong achievement in GCSE is a feature of the subject and an indication of the consistently very good teaching of the subject in both 2000 and 2001 all students who were entered achieved a graded result.

8. The young women currently attending the centre are on target to achieve similarly well. Their work during lessons and in their books indicates strong progress and achievement across a broad range of mathematics topics. Students of all abilities are achieving equally well, with the highest attainers achieving standards in line with students the same age nationally. Young women with EAL cope well with the subject and are making good progress because of the carefully targeted work set for them.

9. Students' work shows very good knowledge and understanding of the topics that will be needed for success in GCSE examinations. They can construct and interpret information in tabular and graphical formats, with the more able students having a clear understanding of more complex graphs representing time and distance. They understand co-ordinates, fractions and decimals; they know and can identify regular polygons and can calculate accurately the perimeter and area of regular and irregular two-dimensional shapes. Despite their professed dislike for mathematics, students make very good progress in understanding that most confusing of topics – algebra. The work in books indicates that they have rapidly assimilated the topic and can confidently solve equations such as $2(x+2)+3(x+4)=31$.

10. Students' work is well presented. They take great care with their work and are clearly, and justifiably, proud of their achievements in mathematics.

Science

11. Students' achievements in science are very good. Their progress in the subject has been significantly improved by the adoption of a new curriculum which focuses on human physiology and health. They find much of interest and relevance in these areas of study and as a result their attitude to the subject is very positive. There is evidence in their written work of very good progress in their knowledge and understanding of topics such as food and digestion and genetics and inheritance. The recording of the results of their experimental work is clear and well-presented and their ability to plan, carry out and evaluate their practical work has developed very well as their confidence has grown. Higher – attainers make predictions in their investigative work with increasing accuracy and make good use of the evidence they collect to explain and justify their conclusions. Among the lower-attainers, there is very good progress in their use and understanding of scientific terminology. Overall,

it seems very likely that GCSE results will be much better than those achieved under any previous syllabus, where outcomes were significantly below those in other subjects.

Information and Communication Technology

12. Students' achievement is good in ICT. The young women are competent in a wide range of ICT and use it effectively to support their work in other subjects. In English, for example, they use sophisticated graphics software to produce stories in 'comic format', which contain photographs they have taken using a digital camera; the finished products being of a very high quality. In drama, with the support of a professional company, they have produced very high quality videos, capturing, for example, their performance of 'Romeo and Juliet' and the poignant 'Messages to our children'.

13. In 2002 a small number of students gained the Entry Level certificate in ICT. This success has raised the ambition of many young women, who are now studying for a certificate in computer literacy. Their work during lessons and in folders indicates that they are on track to attain this qualification.

14. All students use word processing effectively. They enter text accurately and can change the format, font and size with ease to produce good quality work, such as the eye-catching posters and notices that are on display in the centre. Some have progressed to more complex software and can introduce and manipulate photographic images to enhance the quality of their work. Students use the Internet effectively to support their work in other subjects, such as the study of the cultures in different parts of the world where they have assembled information and pictures to produce information sheets about different countries.

15. Higher attaining students are beginning to use spreadsheets effectively to tabulate and present data, which they use to produce accurate reports. They create simple databases and can interrogate them accurately.

16. All young women use ICT enthusiastically. Teaching of the subject is skilled and has helped students overcome the reluctance sometimes shown by young women when faced with anything concerned with ICT. This is a further example of how the centre raises the motivation, aspiration and ambition of its students.

Art

17. Art is a major strength of the centre's curriculum. The quality of work in the subject, and students' growing confidence and expressiveness visible in it, exemplify the development of their aspirations while at the centre. A number of them go on to study the subject at AS and A2 levels. The quality of the work of the two current A2 students, both in its ideas and their execution and also in the research and written work which they produce, is an excellent example of the very good standards achieved in the subject. At all levels, students are encouraged to explore and express their ideas and they respond with enthusiasm to these opportunities in a variety of media. Printing, some 3-D work, collage, computer – generated art as well drawing and painting in a wide range of styles all feature in their work and, in addition, work in other materials and media, such as wood, stained glass and animation, is done to a high standard.

Child Development

18. The standard of work seen and completed by the young women taking the GCSE course in child development is in line with the expectations of the course. In 2002, all of the eleven young women entered for the examination achieved a grade A* to G. Just under half achieved a grade A* to C. Predicted grades for the current year are very similar to those achieved since 2000. Very good teaching and excellent planning, the coverage of relevant topics offered by the curriculum, very positive attitudes to learning and a clear determination on the part of the young women to succeed, ensure that they make very good progress. In addition, the centre nursery provides an excellent resource to help them develop their studies further.

19. Coursework tasks are completed well. There is a noticeable improvement in the progress that the young women make in planning and completing the resource tasks. This results in greater confidence and attention to detail in the individual task. Their coursework and learning in lessons make an important contribution to their personal development and their understanding of parenting and the impact on their child's development. It also offers time for reflection on their experience as young mothers. The students show a growing maturity and ambition in their capacity to pursue ideas, to use ICT to investigate information and to present their work.

Physical Education (Keep Fit)

20. Highly skilled instruction enables the young women to benefit from regular exercise that they see as essential to their health and wellbeing. A heady mix of exceptionally well-planned and disciplined activities and opportunities for the young women to relax and feel liberated are complemented by the instructor's strong engagement with the group. The sessions are designed to be fun and it is clear from the laughter, mutual support and the encouragement that they give to each other that this is the case.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

21. The attitudes, values and personal development of the students who attend the centre are excellent; this is a clear improvement since the last inspection and fully reflecting the energy and endeavour of all staff. Students are highly motivated. Their approach to all that the centre offers is excellent. Exceptional support and guidance has helped them reconcile the demands of motherhood and education in an exemplary manner. Their behaviour, the values they develop and the relationships they form with each other and with the staff are exceptional. Although previously, attendance at school may have been an issue for some students, for many of these it improves. They understand the importance to their own and their babies' futures of gaining an education that includes recognised qualifications. These laudable attitudes are fostered with a passion by the dedicated staff at a centre that makes excellent provision for personal, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

22. These young women have been through a lot and yet their attitudes to the tuition provided for them are excellent. The students of all ages fully engage themselves in their learning. They concentrate and persevere exceptionally well, even for very long periods of time, working hard, seeking support when needed and with high levels of motivation. In an art lesson for Year 11 students, they maintained their concentration for nearly two hours, working hard and at a good pace to create a bas-relief bowl in the given time. Similarly, in a mathematics lesson for post-16 students, they were very productive, working at a rapid pace

to complete a good amount of work in the session. The excellent relationships that staff work so hard to develop have played an important part in promoting students' learning.

23. The students are happy – the centre is truly one big happy family; it is a vibrant, purposeful and sensitive community where students flourish. The young women know that there is always someone to talk things through with, if they are experiencing difficulties. All their fellow students are going through or have been through very similar experiences. They are able to empathise fully and the excellent relationships they build are mutually supportive and respectful. They trust each other to keep an eye on their children and are continually alert to any child's needs. Thus when a baby wails because mum's not bringing dinner quickly enough, there is always someone to distract or pacify it. Because the relationships are so good, the students are able, on the right occasion, to gently chide and tease each other. There are adults in their dealings with each other and their children and have learned to treat others with the same respect and affection they receive from staff.

24. The staff provide excellent role models. They develop strong relationships with the students and support them very effectively to develop into mature and responsible young mothers. The repartee that ensues at appropriate moments is similar to a family discussing and supporting each other; this sets a very good example for some of the young women who may not have had the benefit of good parental role models.

25. Misbehaviour or any form of harassment is not an issue at the centre. Any student experiencing difficulties is encouraged and nurtured so that the difficulties are tackled and overcome. Exclusions are used very sparingly.

26. The students develop high levels of responsibility and independence as mothers and as learners. The students get themselves and, after they are born, their babies to the centre on time; lateness is generally due to transport difficulties. Most are able to organise themselves well, although this skill takes longer to develop in some students than others. The provision in the centre is very effective in raising the students' expectations. For example, two students, discussing their work experience placements in a chemists and travel agency, decided that they had been bored and that they could aspire to something much better.

27. Attendance at the centre remains unsatisfactory overall, although the problem of unauthorised absences lies with a very small number of individual students. Effective action was taken after the last inspection to address the concern raised over attendance. However, the number of students has increased enormously and the level of attendance again raises concerns. Maternity leave and any problems associated with caring for a young baby necessarily disrupts the attendance records of all students at some point. However, many maintain previously good levels of attendance overall and a large number improve their record. This is because they see that what they are being offered is totally relevant to them; they are treated as an individual with their needs being paramount and catered for exceptionally well in a highly supportive environment. A very small number of students experience specific and complex difficulties with attendance and it is these young women that the centre tries very hard to engage. However, their efforts have not been sufficiently supported by the recent LEA decision to allocate only four hours a week of educational welfare service support. This provision is inadequate.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

28. The quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection. It is always at least good, as it was in 1998, but the proportion of very good and excellent teaching is much

greater. Because of the very good teaching they receive students make very good progress and achieve very well; this also is an improvement since the previous inspection.

29. In all subjects, teaching ensures that the young women quickly overcome their previous experiences as learners. They concentrate fiercely in all lessons and work extremely hard to meet the demanding challenges set by the very good, often inspirational teachers. Students are quickly persuaded that they can succeed, their aspirations are raised and their determination to meet the high expectations set for them is almost tangible in all lessons. Lessons are frequently joyous events; the interactions between young women and between them and staff are often punctuated with humour and a sense of fun that is characteristic of the exceptional relationships that exist in the centre. But at the same time, academic learning and achievement are given the highest priority so that students make very good progress in all aspects of their personal, social and academic development. The young women respond well to the additional demands of work for GCSE, including the effective use made of homework in English and mathematics.

30. Teachers know their subjects and their students extremely well and they combine this knowledge of both to very good effect. Lessons are very well planned to meet the needs of each student and to ensure that they achieve the highest of which they are capable. The methods chosen by teachers are excellent and are matched very well to the needs of students. In science for example, a recent assessment of students' learning styles resulted in a complete and highly successful change to the way in which the subject is taught.

31. The centre's approach to behaviour management is excellent. Its focus lies not with students' behaviour, because their behaviour is exemplary. Instead it focuses on helping students to manage the enormous demands placed on them by pregnancy or motherhood and fulfilling their aspirations to achieve academic success. Teaching is highly successful in this endeavour.

32. Teachers are very ably supported by a range of other adults who assist both in lessons and in the provision of other experiences in the centre's innovative curriculum. A learning mentor provides exceptional support and guidance to all students and their all-round development is enhanced by very effective instruction in subjects such as animation, stained-glass work and keep-fit.

33. The on-site nursery makes an enormous contribution to the effectiveness of teaching and learning. Both the young women and their children benefit considerably from the exceptional care and good quality teaching provided by the skilled and dedicated nursery staff. Through their dedication to their work and the skill with which they carry it out, all staff in the centre provide exceptional role models for the young women and their children.

English

34. The teaching of English is based on very good planning which helps to ensure thorough coverage of every aspect of the subject. The very relevant subject-matter of activities and materials adds much to pupils' interest and enjoyment. The teaching of writing, in particular of the organisation of longer pieces and of the variation of style for different purposes, is very effective. This an important factor in the very good preparation of students for their GCSE and AS level work. Good provision is made for students with literacy difficulties. The assessment of their progress and the individual targets set for them lack precision but they respond very well to their teachers' high expectations and to the very effective support provided for them in the classroom.

Mathematics

35. Teaching and learning in mathematics are very good. The strength in mathematics teaching lies in teachers' capacity to make the subject accessible and interesting to young women who have previously found it daunting. The very highest expectations are set for students and only the very best of their work is accepted. Students' response to this is quite remarkable; they concentrate throughout lessons, persevere even when faced with difficulties and expend considerable intellectual effort to solve the problems they have been set and when the 'get it right' they show delight.

36. Students are set demanding challenges by both the level of work and the pace of learning required by them to achieve success. They respond to these challenges with determination and enthusiasm. Teaching is highly skilled; it has helped many young women to overcome their fear of mathematics and to aspire to, and achieve, significant levels of GCSE success.

37. Teachers know the subject very well and are adept at presenting work in a way which stimulates students interest and motivation. Students' individual abilities are catered for extremely well, both by the setting of appropriately matched tasks and by the skilful individual support provided by the teacher. In a Year 11 lesson on data handling for example, all students made very good progress because the teacher had planned a range of tasks very effectively so that the higher-attaining students were stretched by new material while lower-attaining students consolidated their existing knowledge and gained confidence that they will succeed in forthcoming examinations.

Science

38. The teaching of science is very good. There is a particular strength in the planning of the subject. Learning objectives are set out very clearly. Students have a very good understanding, as a result, of what they are doing and how it fits into their programme of study. Teaching is very skilled in the way it avoids overloading the students with too much information. It focuses on the essential elements of a topic and provides very effective reinforcement of key concepts and vocabulary. Resources and accommodation for the subject are limited but very well-designed experiments and activities make optimum use of what is available. The basic principles of 'fair testing' and of accuracy in measurement in particular are very well-taught and some initial resistance to and uncertainty about the subject, especially among the lower-attainers, are rapidly overcome. To this end, teaching uses assessment information very perceptively to identify areas which are causing problems for students and to plan for changes in curriculum content and teaching methods.

Art

39. The teaching of art is very good. It combines high levels of specialist knowledge and expertise with an enthusiastic and very supportive approach to all pupils, whatever their level of attainment. The art room is a very popular, busy and productive area of the centre. Its atmosphere is relaxed and informal but expectations are high. Teaching encourages students to work independently and to express their ideas freely but at the same time the management and organisation of a rich variety of activities and the regular monitoring of students' progress in them are carried out very effectively. The results, in terms of pupils' commitment to and pride in their work, are outstanding.

Information and Communication Technology

40. Teaching and learning are very good. Only one formal lesson was observed during the inspection, but observation of students using information technology at other times, to support their work in other subjects, and a detailed analysis of their work confirms that they have been taught well.

41. Students use ICT with great familiarity and confidence. They are not daunted by computers, which they use successfully in all aspects of their work. As in other subjects, the skilled teaching of ICT has enabled students to aspire to and achieve success. Teaching of the subject is well planned because the teacher has a very good knowledge and understanding of both the subject and her students. This enables the setting of tasks that are well-matched to students' prior attainment and consequently students' self confidence and their belief that they can succeed grows rapidly.

42. In the one lesson observed, teaching and learning were very good. Students used a range of applications to support their work in child development. Because of the teacher's very good knowledge of the subject, students were able to use sophisticated photographic imaging software to produce posters of a very high standard. Students' concentration and effort applied during this lesson were extremely high and, as in all lessons seen during the inspection, their behaviour was impeccable.

Child Development

43. Overall the quality of teaching and learning is very good. One of the lessons seen was of excellent quality. The teaching not only provides the young women with the knowledge, skills and understanding to promote positive parenting but also emphasises and values the contribution that their personal experience makes to the course. Every opportunity is taken to celebrate motherhood. Skilful teaching instils confidence and gives the young women time to think, reflect and present ideas. Through their willingness to express opinions and to talk about their experience they learn quickly.

44. In the excellent lesson, planned with exemplary precision and clarity, detailed knowledge of the young women's learning needs and circumstances were met through a variety of briskly presented activities. Despite the limitations of language, the young women gained the confidence to present ideas orally and to then present the results of their survey by using the computer to create a spreadsheet and graph of their results. Along the way, well phrased and probing questions ensured that the students fully understood the value of the work they were undertaking. As a result the young women were receptive and interested and made very good progress in their understanding and appreciation of how childhood accidents can occur and their prevention.

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

45. The curriculum provides a very good range of learning opportunities, offering breadth, balance and exceptional relevance to the needs of the young women. This relevance is evident not only in courses such as child care and personal, social and health education but also in the more traditional academic subjects, in which the students' own experiences and interests are reflected wherever possible in the planning of topics and activities and in the

course materials used. This is a major factor in the excellent attitudes to learning which the young women develop in the centre.

46. In addition to the major subjects, there are other, shorter or occasional courses which do much to enrich the curriculum. Examples include car mechanics, drama, film animation and stained glass work. This is made possible by the very effective use of flexibility both in the planning of the curriculum and in the deployment of staff. In addition to the qualified teachers on the staff of the centre, a multi-talented group of instructors together with personnel from a number of external services and organisations generate a truly impressive range of opportunities for the young women, both in the centre and in the wider community. The benefits of flexibility are also seen in the way the normal timetable is sometimes suspended or altered to allow special activities to take place. The 'Be Real' game, a very imaginative, two-day careers and citizenship exercise and a visit to the Create Centre which, together with the follow-up activities, took up a day during the inspection week, are examples of the centre's innovative approach to curriculum planning.

47. A very good range of accreditation, from single unit awards and certificates to Advanced Level qualifications, is provided for students. The strategies for teaching literacy skills are very effective. There is good provision for numeracy skills. Given the practical difficulties involved, there is an excellent range of extra-curricular activities. Issues surrounding sexual relationships, contraception, drugs and alcohol are major components of a very good programme of personal, social and health education. There have been significant improvements in the arrangements for careers and work-related education which were identified as key issues for action in the last inspection. These are now good, although the centre recognises that they contain areas for further development. A very effective key skills course, advice from the 'Connexions' agency, opportunities for an increasing number of vocational qualifications and the use of external providers of training courses have all helped to raise the profile of this area of the curriculum and, despite practical difficulties, successful work experience placements have been provided for some of the young women.

48. The arrangements for access to this very good curriculum and the action taken by the centre to ensure that all its students are included in its activities are excellent. A small but significant number have special educational needs. Although the individual planning and target-setting for these students require improvement, the very good progress they make reflects the very effective provision which is made for them. The arrangements for the support of pupils who have English as an additional language, however, are unsatisfactory. The centre does not receive sufficient specialist support to meet their needs.

49. The centre's outward-looking attitude means that the wider community provides the setting for many activities in the curriculum. There are excellent links not only with schools, colleges and independent providers of training and other educational activities but also with agencies concerned with the care and guidance of the young women, for example, in health and housing. The numerous visitors to the centre, such as midwives and careers advisers, artists and performers, provide further evidence of the very productive links the centre enjoys with the community.

50. Provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the students was described as satisfactory at the last inspection. It is now excellent. There are very good opportunities throughout the curriculum for the young women to reflect on their own and others' experiences and to develop their self-knowledge. Their ideas are valued by staff and tolerance and understanding of others are key features of the excellent relationships which prevail in the centre. At the same time, teaching promotes a very clear understanding of responsibilities as well as of rights. The provision for the students' cultural development is excellent. The videotape of their version of 'Romeo and Juliet' is but one example of many of

their enthusiastic and confident participation in the opportunities provided in the creative and performing arts. Their appreciation of the diversity of other cultures, which was judged to be a weakness at the time of the last report, is now effectively promoted through a variety of activities ranging from the study of different birth traditions, events such as a workshop with a Chinese artist to the use of the Internet to research cultural aspects of other countries.

HOW WELL DOES THE UNIT CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

51. The procedures for child protection and for ensuring the welfare of the young women attending the centre are very good. This is an improvement since the last inspection.

52. Policies and procedures for child protection and restraint are now fully in place. The staff fully understands the particular context in which these policies and procedures need to operate. Health and safety concerns reported at the time of the last inspection have been dealt with through the provision of new accommodation. Risk assessments are now given close attention by the centre; the detailed recording of accidents, safety checks, fire drills and related matters is now in place.

53. The educational and personal support and guidance provided is excellent. For many of the young women the centre is a lifeline; it enables them to adjust to the change in their lives and prepares them well for motherhood. The young women know that they and their children are valued members of the centre's community. The determination of all staff to provide the very best in educational provision and pastoral care clearly enables the young women to work hard towards their personal aspirations. There is a strong and tangible partnership in the relationships that the young women develop with the staff at the centre. This is also seen in their response to those visitors to the centre who provide pragmatic but very sensitive guidance and valuable enrichment to the educational experience and personal development of the students. The young women have an increased likelihood of engaging with education and enhancing their sense of personal responsibility through their positive experience of attending The Meriton. The centre is a leading player in providing effective and practical support as part of the local authority's Teenage Pregnancy Initiative.

54. The atmosphere in the centre is one of warmth and mutual support. During the inspection visit there were several occasions when the students offered each other friendship, affection, helpful advice with work, and genuine interest in how their children were progressing. The staff is adept at listening and observing, and in putting forward carefully considered ideas for the young women to take on board and reflect upon. This is at heart of the centre's strategy to develop mature and responsible young mothers and in its determination to ensure that they can also benefit from very high quality education and the qualifications that can be achieved.

55. The nursery provides an outstanding quality of care for the babies and young children. Carefully planned activities are designed to promote social and emotional and intellectual growth of the children. Observations of their development are meticulously recorded and milestones celebrated. The nursery nurses provide very good role models for the young mothers as they demonstrate high levels of care and concern for the welfare of the children in their charge. This is particularly the case for those young mothers who lack confidence in their parenting skills. The nursery also provides a valuable resource for those students who wish to use the facility for work experience or to contribute to their coursework for GCSE child development.

56. The weekly assessment meeting is a valuable opportunity for staff to consider and target the specific educational needs of the young women. Advice and ideas are shared on

specific teaching and learning approaches. The learning mentor plays a crucial and very effective role in enabling the young women to meet their specific targets and in addressing any specific problems that the students may encounter. There are examples of innovative and very effective practice in assessment when it is used to identify individual learning needs and specific approaches to the learning planned for lessons. For example, this is seen in food technology where an assessment of the students' achievement and response indicated that the GCSE syllabus involved too much written work and that a change to the short practical units of work accredited through AQA would be of greater benefit. In science, as part of the key skills' work, the students have analysed what sort of learners they are and, as a result, have identified that for the vast majority, visual approaches are of greater benefit. Accordingly, the planning of the lessons and the approach to learning has enabled the young women to undertake large-scale visual work as part of their studies in human physiology. Detailed knowledge about the needs of the young women ensures that the centre is very effective in meeting their academic and personal needs. However, there is a need to rationalise the documentation currently being used and to upgrade the information that it provides. For example, at present insufficient assessment information is being recorded for science, ICT and child development. This is especially important with regard to child development that has, since the last inspection, become a core subject within the curriculum.

57. At present there is a lack of detail in the individual education plans (IEP) for those students with special educational needs. The targets on these plans need to be sharpened so that they better inform the work planned for these students. In their present format no clear picture of targets and progress in literacy and numeracy emerges.

58. After the last inspection, the centre took effective measures to improve the identified low level of attendance. However, the numbers who now attend the centre have increased and the level of attendance again gives rise for concern. The centre's attendance policy is clear and provides a good range of tangible rewards. These work well in promoting good attendance by most students. However, there is a very small number of students who have large numbers of unauthorised absences. Currently the centre does not have the personnel or the time to devote to making a real difference to the attendance of these young women all of whom face considerable personal and family difficulties. The centre receives a nominal four hours of support each week from the educational welfare service. Although the officer has worked hard, the amount of time is too little to deal with the complexity of these cases in which the building of a supportive and trusting relationship between the centre and the students is paramount. Furthermore, the failure of another LEA service to provide flexible and timely support to an innovative staff appointment has further impeded the improvement of students' attendance.

HOW WELL DOES THE UNIT WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

59. The parents' views of the centre are very positive. The majority agree that their daughters like attending the centre, that they make good progress because they are expected to work hard and achieve their best. Parents particularly like the way their daughters are treated as young adults and encouraged to raise their expectations and to aspire to further or higher education. There is also strong agreement that the centre is well led and managed. Most importantly they believe the centre helps restore their daughters' confidence and put fun back into their lives. Inspectors fully support all these very positive comments made about the centre and its staff.

60. The information, provided both for the students and their parents is good. An annual report is provided in the autumn term for the young women and their parents, where they are involved, in the subjects that are studied by them. The comments, directed chiefly at the

students, are honest, supportive and clear. A newsletter, covering the centre and the nursery, is sent out termly. It contains an interesting and informative range of reports and articles, many written by the students and often reflecting their own experiences. Other information is provided as needed.

61. The centre makes considerable efforts to develop a good relationship with parents, and those with parental responsibility, that will be of benefit to the young women it serves. Generally these are successful and these links work well. Parents are encouraged to come to the centre when their daughters make their initial visit and many take this opportunity. They are also made to feel welcome whenever they visit and are encouraged to keep in close contact with the staff. Records show that a lot of contact is made with parents over the telephone. Many parents say that as a result, there are fewer upsets at home and that their daughters come home with a positive attitude and a desire to talk about what they have done. The centre has aspirations to provide greater and more beneficial links with students' families and to improve the attendance of students. It has plans to try to develop the involvement of parents in its work by encouraging them to attend courses at the centre, as well as coming to the various parents' meetings to which they are already invited. However, the centre sometimes finds it very difficult to contact the person who has parental responsibility for the young woman. This is often the case when they are living in supported accommodation. Furthermore, these initiatives have been thwarted by the failure of an LEA department to respond with sufficient urgency to their plans to create the post of an inclusion worker to help develop and enhance their links with parents and students.

HOW WELL IS THE UNIT LED AND MANAGED?

62. The leadership and management of the centre have improved since the last inspection and are now excellent at all levels. The headteacher, staff, steering group and LEA officer responsible for the centre, work together effectively to ensure that the management of the centre is shared and successful. The centre has an overwhelming sense of community. Staff and students flourish in an atmosphere of mutual confidence, trust and respect.

63. The headteacher's leadership of the centre, described as strong by the last inspection, is now excellent. The headteacher leads by example; she provides inspirational leadership. Her commitment to the development of the centre and the achievement of its students inspires staff and students alike to strive for the highest possible standards. She provides an outstanding role model and is passionately committed to the improvement of the centre and to the achievement of high standards and quality. She encourages staff to explore the boundaries of possibility for students and staff alike so that the young women's aspirations for themselves and the staffs' expectations of them are extremely high. As a result, teaching and learning are very good and students achieve the best of which they are capable. The staff, as a group, provide excellent role models for their students.

64. Management is excellent at all levels and administration is smooth and efficient. The focus of management is to raise young women's aspirations and to improve their confidence and sense of self-worth and in doing so help them to achieve academic success and be good mothers to their children. All staff are aware of this aim and they strive tirelessly to achieve it – and they do. The headteacher is supported well by all staff. Management is a collaborative venture inspired by the excellent leadership of the headteacher, which results in a centre that aspires to and achieves the highest of standards in almost all that it does. The commitment to improve still further and the capacity to do so are excellent.

65. The steering group has, in recent months, set out to improve its own effectiveness and the quality of support it provides to the centre. It has been successful and now provides excellent support to the centre. It is involved fully in the life of the centre, knows its strengths and weaknesses very well and plays a key role in shaping the agenda for improvement. The LEA and steering group fulfil their statutory responsibilities very well and in the main have responded effectively to the requirements of the last report, although the LEA response to the requirement to provide better support for students' attendance has been slow and, until recently, largely ineffective. The role of the centre is set out clearly in the policies of the LEA and in those of the centre itself. The LEA now has a policy for the education of students otherwise than at school, as required by the last inspection. The referrals and admissions procedures are effective.

66. Development planning is highly effective and has secured very good improvement since the last inspection. The centre's monitoring of its own performance is excellent. It monitors carefully all aspects of its performance, evaluates rigorously the evidence it collects and takes very effective action to secure improvement. The scale and intimacy of the centre is such that the headteacher, steering group and LEA are fully aware of the effectiveness of performance at all levels and have a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the centre. The centre considers carefully the ways in which it can improve, identifies appropriate priorities and constructs effective plans to secure improvement.

67. The work of the centre is guided by an appropriate set of aims, which it is successful in meeting because it brings together all aspects of its work so that the very good teaching and curriculum and the outstanding care for students act together to help students succeed, both in the centre and in later life. Its success can be measured by the high number of students who gain examination success, who return to the centre to extend their studies to advanced level and who progress to further and higher education. Students who enter the centre with low self-esteem, make rapid gains in their academic and personal development. These gains are due to the highly effective teaching and the ethos of the centre, which quickly convinces them that they are valued as individuals. For many young women this is a novel experience, which boosts their self-confidence so that they enjoy attending the centre, behave well and consequently, make remarkable progress in a very short time.

68. The recruitment, induction and deployment of staff are particular strengths of the centre. The skills and expertise of members of the staff team are complementary so that students are provided with an imaginative and highly motivating curriculum. The centre has sufficient well-qualified and experienced staff. The induction arrangements for new staff are very good. Teaching and non-teaching staff benefit from an excellent performance system, which is fully integrated with the centre's improvement planning process. Staff have good access to a wide range of appropriate training and development opportunities.

69. The strategic use of resources is excellent. The centre uses its devolved budget to the very best effect. The acquisition and deployment of expertise and resources ensures that students' enjoy a rich curriculum and achieve high standards. The centre has invested its budget wisely since the last inspection. The range and quality of books and equipment for each subject have improved. The centre now has sufficient resources to teach effectively. The new accommodation is very good and has improved significantly since the last inspection, although storage space remains inadequate. There are sufficient classrooms, of a good size, to teach the number of students on roll.

70. Financial administration of the budget is very good; the centre uses resources effectively to raise standards and improve quality. The administrative assistant works very well in collaboration with the LEA finance section to ensure that correct accounting procedures operate and that the budget is used to best effect. Management information

systems are used effectively. Specific grants are used effectively and correctly and the centre applies the principles of best value excellently.

WHAT SHOULD THE UNIT DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

In order to assist the centre to raise even further the existing high standards and quality the LEA should take prompt and effective action to:

- (1) support the centre to improve the attendance of students who find regular attendance difficult;
- (2) support the centre to meet the needs of students in the very earliest stage of learning English as an additional language;

In addition the headteacher and staff should address the following minor issue:

- (1) rationalise the assessment of students' attainment and progress so that planning for individual students, especially those whose attendance is sporadic, is more effective.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	21
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	30

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Number	2	8	10	1			
Percentage	10	38	48	5			

The table gives the number and percentage of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about teaching. Care should be taken when interpreting these percentages as each lesson represents more than four percentage points.

Information about the unit's pupils

Pupils on the unit's roll	No of pupils
Number of pupils on the unit's roll	56

Special educational needs	No of pupils
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	1
Number of pupils on the unit's special educational needs register	7

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	1

Attendance

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
	%		%
Unit data	32	Unit data	10

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 (Year 11)

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	2002	N/A	24	24

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Girls	0	2	23
	Total	0	2	23
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	0	12	96
	National	N/A	N/A	N/A

Percentages in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	14
	National	N/A

Figures in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

Ethnic background of pupils

Categories used in the Annual School Census
White – British
White – Irish
White – any other White background
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean
Mixed – White and Black African
Mixed – White and Asian
Mixed – any other mixed background
Asian or Asian British - Indian
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background
Black or Black British – Caribbean
Black or Black British – African
Black or Black British – any other Black background
Chinese
Any other ethnic group
No ethnic group recorded

Exclusions in the last school year

No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
17	1	
0		
3		
6		
1		

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y10 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	5.1
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	11

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y10 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	2
Total aggregate hours worked per week	26

Financial information

Financial year	2002-03
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	£
Total income	229794
Total expenditure	229794
Expenditure per pupil	4103
Balance brought forward from previous year	N/A
Balance carried forward to next year	N/A

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the unit during the last two years	0
Number of teachers appointed to the unit during the last two years	0

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	1
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out

56

Number of questionnaires returned

8

Summary of parents' and carers' responses

Parents and carers who returned the questionnaire or attended the pre-inspection meeting were enthusiastic in their support for the centre. They agreed that their daughters like the centre and are making good progress, both academically and socially. They consider that teaching is good and that the centre is well led and managed. They believe that the centre is helping their daughters to become mature and responsible.