

INSPECTION REPORT

STEVENAGE EDUCATION SUPPORT CENTRE

Stevenage

LEA area: Hertfordshire

Unique reference number: 130359

Headteacher: Mr Philip Elcock

Reporting inspector: Ms Margaret Julia Goodchild
15918

Dates of inspection: 16 – 17 September 2002

Inspection number: 249505

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE UNIT

Type of school:	Pupil referral unit
Unit category:	Permanently excluded/at risk of exclusion
Age range of pupils:	11 to 16
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Unit address:	Chells Way Stevenage Hertfordshire
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Appropriate authority:	Hertfordshire LEA
Name of responsible officer	Nick Powley
Date of previous inspection:	October 2000

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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15918	Margaret Julia Goodchild	Registered inspector	English	How high are standards?
			Art and design	How well are pupils taught?
			Personal, social and health education	How well is the unit led and managed?
			Equal opportunities	What should the unit do to improve further?
1166	Rosemary Hussain	Lay inspector		How well does the unit care for its pupils? How well does the unit work in partnership with parents?
23886	Declan McCarthy	Team inspector	Mathematics	
			Science	
			Information and communication technology	
			Physical education	
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE UNIT

Stevenage Education Support Centre is both the work base for the Behaviour Support Outreach Team* and a tuition centre for the education of pupils out of school within Stevenage: the latter is the focus of this inspection. The centre serves the needs of pupils in Years 7 to 9 (but has no Year 7 and 8 pupils at present) and Years 10 and 11 who have been permanently excluded from mainstream school, are on fixed term exclusions of more than 15 days, and those who have no other school place as a result of their medical or special educational needs. The centre also supports pupils who are returning to school through an agreed re-integration programme. There are currently ten pupils on roll, nine boys and one girl, all of white-UK heritage. These pupils have nearly all been permanently excluded from mainstream school and have emotional and behavioural difficulties. One pupil has a statement of special educational needs. Attendance at the centre is only meant to be short term: pupils are expected to return to mainstream or special school at the earliest opportunity. Four Year 11 pupils are dual registered with the Youth Programmes Unit, which they attend for part of the week; the remaining pupils attend full time. Pupils joining the centre are often disaffected, lack confidence and have low self-esteem. Pupils' attainment on entry is generally below average and all pupils have a history of underachievement.

** Currently, 216 pupils in mainstream schools receive preventative outreach support from staff based at the centre.*

HOW GOOD THE UNIT IS

This is a sound pupil referral unit. Pupils' academic achievement is satisfactory overall and those who attend regularly make good progress in mathematics, science, art and information and communication technology. However, the high rate of unauthorised absence means that a minority of pupils miss a significant amount of work and do not achieve as well as they should. Teaching is good and most pupils display positive attitudes to learning. They make good progress in their personal development. The head of centre provides satisfactory leadership and ensures that the centre is managed well from day to day. It provides good value for money.

What the unit does well

- The centre succeeds in reintegrating about half its pupils into mainstream schools.
- Pupils have the opportunity to take up to four GCSE courses and to gain an increasing number of other qualifications.
- Teaching is good and a number of subjects are co-ordinated by specialists, many of whom are recently appointed.
- The centre pays good attention to pupils' welfare, and staff are effective in promoting pupils' social and moral development; as a result, pupils increase in self-confidence and their attitudes to learning improve.
- Parents appreciate the support the centre provides and find staff very approachable.
- The local education authority (LEA) and management committee provide good support to the work of the centre; the LEA provides some highly effective monitoring of the centre's work.

What could be improved

- The overall rate of attendance is unsatisfactory: although many pupils – especially in Year 9 – attend very regularly, there is a high rate of unauthorised absence amongst older pupils.
- Assessment and recording could be improved and reports to parents could provide more information about pupils' attainment and their academic progress.
- Provision for pupils with learning difficulties could be improved, particularly in relation to the diagnosis of literacy difficulties and the quality of individual education plans.
- The internal leadership and strategic management of the centre could be further developed; the centre is at an early stage in establishing systems for monitoring and evaluation.
- Staff do not manage challenging behaviour with sufficient firmness and consistency or keep comprehensive records of behavioural incidents.

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 satisfactory overall improvement since it was inspected in October 2000, with good improvement in some areas. There has been significant improvement in staffing arrangements and in the curriculum. The quality of teaching has improved from satisfactory to good and there has been an increase in the number of pupils achieving success at GCSE. Teachers now have permanent contracts and most subjects are co-ordinated by specialists. A part-time special educational needs co-ordinator has been appointed and individual education plans have been developed, although targets are not yet specific enough. Pupils who were permanently excluded from mainstream school have begun to attend the centre full time and the curriculum is therefore broader. There are now some planned social opportunities, although there is not sufficient planning for pupils' spiritual and cultural development. A number of major changes have been managed effectively, such as the appointment of permanent staff and preparation for full-time provision, and the centre continues to function smoothly from day to day. An assistant head of centre has taken up post; it is intended that this will lead to further improvement in leadership and in some aspects of management. There has been unsatisfactory improvement in the way the centre assesses pupils, in the records it keeps and in the information provided in reports to parents.

STANDARDS

The table summarises inspectors' judgements about how well pupils are achieving in relation to their individual targets.

Progress in:	by Year 9	by Year 11	Key	
English	C	C	very good	A
mathematics	C	C	good	B
science	C	C	satisfactory	C
personal, social and health education	B	B	unsatisfactory	D
other personal targets set at annual reviews or in IEPs*	C	C	poor	E

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

Pupils' overall achievement is satisfactory. Those pupils who attend regularly make good progress in art, mathematics, science and information and communication technology. Progress is good in some English lessons but pupils' work shows that progress over time is no better than satisfactory, even for pupils whose attendance is good. The poor attendance of a minority of older pupils – particularly in Year 11 – means that they underachieve and this pulls down the centre's overall performance.

Since the last inspection, there has been an increase in the number of GCSE courses available at the centre and an improvement in pupils' performance at GCSE. In 2001, three pupils gained five A* to G grades, one gained two GCSE passes and another pupil achieved one pass. Four of these pupils also gained accreditation in key skills. A much larger number of pupils in all years gain AQA (Assessment & Qualifications Authority) unit awards. The centre's success rate in returning short-stay pupils to mainstream school has remained good since the last inspection.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the unit	The vast majority of pupils have positive attitudes and co-operate in the learning process.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Most pupils behave well. A small minority of pupils behave inappropriately and records show that some others, who were not present during the inspection, exhibit unsatisfactory and sometimes poor behaviour.
Personal development and relationships	The centre breeds confidence in pupils and raises their self-esteem. Those who are given opportunities to show initiative can be trusted to respond appropriately. The relationships established between teachers and pupils are good.
Attendance	Attendance is unsatisfactory. The attendance of some pupils shows significant improvement and they attend very well. The overall figures are skewed by the poor attendance of some pupils in Year 10 and especially in Year 11.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	Years 7 to 9	Years 10 and 11
Quality of teaching	Good	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 good overall and it is already evident that the improvement in staffing is leading to better quality teaching. During the inspection, teaching was good overall in English, mathematics and science. No lessons of personal, social and health education were taught during the inspection, so it is not possible to make a clear judgement about teaching in this subject. Teaching is purposeful and teachers' good subject knowledge means that they are able to make use of a range of methods. They have good questioning skills and clearly value pupils' contributions. They do not always manage challenging behaviour with sufficient firmness and their expectations are not always as high as they should be. The skills of numeracy are taught well; there are some shortcomings in the teaching of literacy. Teachers make satisfactory provision for the range of learning needs within the centre. Pupils generally

show interest in learning and most co-operate with teachers. They tend to be dependent learners but sometimes show initiative.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE UNIT

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The curriculum is now good. The move to full-time provision has broadened the range of learning opportunities available to pupils.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	This is satisfactory overall, but individual education plans do not have sufficiently focused learning targets and there are weaknesses in the identification of pupils' literacy difficulties.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	There are no pupils with English as an additional language on role at present.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	The centre provides well for pupils' personal development. Provision for social and moral development is good; that for spiritual and cultural development is satisfactory. Pupils are made to feel valued by the staff and this contributes to their sense of self-worth, but there are few opportunities for reflection. The centre teaches pupils about racism, although there are only limited opportunities for them to develop a multicultural awareness.
How well the unit cares for its pupils	The centre makes good provision for pupils' welfare and there is ample personal support. Support for pupils' academic development is satisfactory overall. Weaknesses in assessment mean that their academic progress is not monitored as closely as it should be, and behaviour is not managed as consistently and firmly as it might be.

Partnership with parents and carers is good. They are welcomed into the centre and there is good informal contact with them. Formal information, for instance, in reports to parents, is not comprehensive enough.

HOW WELL THE UNIT IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The leadership of the head of centre and other key staff is satisfactory. Day-to-day management of the centre is good; strategic management is satisfactory. The recent delegation of some management responsibilities should support improved management throughout the centre.
How well the management committee fulfils its responsibilities	The management committee fulfils its responsibilities well and provides good support to the centre. The LEA provides good overall support and provides some very good guidance in helping the centre to develop.
The unit's evaluation of its performance	The centre does not have effective internal systems in place to monitor and evaluate its performance; this is a key area for development.
The strategic use of resources	The centre makes good use of its resources. It pays satisfactory attention to applying the principles of best value.

There is a good match between teachers' qualifications and the subjects they teach. Most subjects are co-ordinated by teachers who are qualified in the subject and most lessons are

taught by subject specialists. There is a small and effective team of non-teaching staff. The centre's accommodation is satisfactory and subject-specialist rooms have been established since the last inspection. The centre is well resourced, and resourcing for ICT has improved significantly; it is now very good.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE UNIT

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children work and concentrate better in the small classes provided at the centre. • The centre promotes very good attitudes and values. • The consistent approach to behaviour management at the centre supports improved behaviour at home. • Staff are readily available and willing to discuss any problems. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having a playground would better support pupils' social development.

Inspectors' judgements support the view that pupils benefit from working in the small classes provided at the centre. Appropriate attention is paid to promoting positive attitudes, but the management of behaviour is not consistent: the behaviour of challenging pupils is not managed as well as it could be. Staff are approachable and more than willing to support parents. Whilst an outdoor play area would be a useful addition to the centre's accommodation, it is not usual for pupil referral units to have outdoor playgrounds. The introduction of physical education to the curriculum means that pupils are now having the opportunity to develop physical skills in an outdoor environment and to work as part of a team.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The unit's results and pupils' achievements

1. Since the last inspection, there has been an increase in the number of GCSE courses available at the centre and an improvement in pupils' performance at GCSE. In 2001, three pupils gained five A* to G grades (with all performance in the D to G range), one gained two GCSE passes and another pupil achieved one pass. Four of these pupils also gained accreditation in key skills at level 1. In 2002, the two pupils who completed Year 11 both gained one or more GCSE passes at A* to G and also passed key skills at level 1. A much larger number of pupils in all years gain AQA (Assessment & Qualifications Authority) unit awards. Whereas these began in art, the centre is now extending their use into other areas, so that in 2002 some units were gained also in mathematics, English and information and communication technology. The success rate in returning short-stay pupils to mainstream school has remained good since the last inspection.
2. Pupils' achievement is satisfactory overall. Many pupils make good progress but the rate of attendance is unsatisfactory and there has been a particularly high rate of unauthorised absence amongst the older pupils, especially in Year 11, over the past year. This is having an adverse effect on the achievement of the pupils concerned and on the centre's overall performance. Higher-attaining pupils make satisfactory progress; those with learning difficulties make satisfactory progress overall, although they are not making as much progress as they should in the development of literacy skills.

English

3. A minority of pupils arrive with learning difficulties in reading, writing and spelling, whilst others' literacy skills are close to the expectation for their age. Overall attainment in English is below average on entry. Standards remain below average at the end of Year 9 and at the end of Year 11, and pupils achieve satisfactorily in Year 9 and in Years 10 and 11. Progress is good in some English lessons but pupils' work shows that achievement over time is no better than satisfactory, even for pupils whose attendance is good. The minority of pupils whose attendance is poor necessarily under-achieve, although there is evidence of progress in some of the work they produce when they are present. Pupils with literacy difficulties receive some focused support and benefit from the small numbers in classes, but their difficulties are not thoroughly diagnosed and support is not consistently targeted to their individual literacy needs. The only girl currently on roll – in Year 11 – produces work of a higher standard than that produced by the boys, but she is underachieving because her attendance is poor.
4. Most pupils listen carefully but in all years they tend to speak in response to specific questions, rather than initiating conversation. They are able to convey information and share a little of their own experience using a limited vocabulary. Higher-attaining pupils speak confidently and have a more extensive vocabulary at their disposal.
5. Most pupils are making satisfactory progress in reading. In Year 9, average-attaining pupils can read for information and their comprehension is evident in their ability, for example, to list the main points that they have read. In a Year 9 lesson, a higher-attaining pupil showed independent thinking when talking about the features typically found in a ghost story. He had some knowledge of setting and mood, and of the

differences between horror stories and ghost stories. He declined to read aloud but was able to make some predictions and inferences from the story the teacher had read. In another Year 9 lesson, pupils showed some understanding of the possible physical appearance of a hero or heroine, but expressed no awareness of the inner qualities of such a character. The reading of pupils with literacy difficulties is well below the standard expected at their chronological ages and their progress is slow.

6. Average-attaining pupils in Year 9 are confident in the use of basic punctuation and their spelling is usually phonetically plausible, although their free writing includes a number of technical errors. They organise their ideas in a logical sequence and are able to sustain an argument. They make some interesting choices in the use of words, but show limited control of grammar. The written work of lower-attaining pupils and those with literacy difficulties is laboured and contains many mistakes, although there is evidence of some progress in handwriting and particularly in the ability to record ideas in science and humanities. Their ability to generate their own ideas in their writing is extremely limited.
7. There was limited evidence of pupils' written work in Year 11, since the inspection took place early in the autumn term. An average-attaining pupil who is new to the centre writes fluently and sets out his work clearly; most spelling is correct but he is unclear about some grammatical rules. A higher-attaining pupil makes use of more sophisticated structures in her writing, setting out her work in paragraphs. Analysis of an information booklet shows an ability to discuss style and effectiveness, and an awareness of the reader or audience. She writes persuasively and maintains the reader's interest, but has produced a limited body of work as a result of her poor attendance. From the work available for scrutiny, it would appear that she was not challenged a great deal by the tasks that were set during her time in Year 10. Pupils currently in Year 10 are making satisfactory progress. They are able to read for information and, in their selection of some detail from set texts, show a fundamental understanding of plot and character. Some pieces of written work by a higher-attaining pupil show that he is able to create atmosphere and write persuasively. In their first drafts, average-attaining pupils in Year 10 are unsure in their use of capital letters and their work includes spelling errors, though spelling is generally phonetically plausible.

Mathematics

8. Most pupils make good progress because teaching is at least good and sometimes very good. However, pupils whose attendance is poor underachieve during their time at the centre. Pupils in Year 9 are developing their knowledge of measures and know that a circle can be divided into four segments. They compare tally tables of different swimming times and draw bar charts to record their data, interpreting the information accurately. Higher-attaining pupils know that a quarter turn is ninety degrees. Pupils make good progress in developing their numeracy skills, using tables for multiplication and division, although lower-attaining pupils are not yet secure, for example in their use of the six times table. Pupils in Year 10 build on their prior learning making good progress in the use of mathematics, as reflected in the work they have produced for Unit Awards. For example, they are able to convert analogue time into digital time and read bus and train timetables to calculate various arrival and departure times. Pupils in Year 11 are making good progress in their GCSE work; for example, during the inspection they increased their understanding and use of the principles of measuring bearings in a clockwise direction from the north. There was limited evidence of Year 11 work, because the inspection took place early in the academic year.

Science

9. Pupils in all year groups who regularly attend the centre are achieving well and sometimes make very good progress in lessons. Those with poor attendance do not achieve as well as they should. The teacher's effective use of computers and the opportunities pupils have to engage in practical investigation make significant contributions to their progress. Pupils are developing their skills of investigation, and they write up scientific experiments with increasing accuracy.
10. Pupils in Year 9 are making good progress in their knowledge of acids and alkalis. They identify and record common household acids such as vinegar and lemon juice and familiar alkalis such as bleach. They know that different areas of the tongue enable us to taste sweet and sour foods and they understand the difference between bitter and sour foodstuffs. Pupils in Year 10 are making good progress in developing electrical circuits and in understanding how they work. They know how to measure current and that resistance will vary according to the thickness of a wire.
11. In Year 11, pupils are making very good progress on their GCSE course. For example, in their understanding of atomic structure, pupils know the differences between electrons, protons and neutrons and they use this knowledge to calculate atomic numbers accurately. They also have good knowledge of the differences between plant and animal cells and understand cell division. Scrutiny of pupils' work shows that they use computers confidently to research and record data, such as information on the relative size of planets in their study of the solar system.

Art and design

12. Pupils are making good progress overall. Some pupils make very good progress; those whose attendance is poor are making less progress than they could but still completing some AQA Unit Awards, because teaching is very focused.
13. In Years 9 and 10, pupils broaden their visual awareness and complete a number of Unit Awards. Typically, they explore shape and pattern; produce some drawings from secondary sources; experiment with lettering; place shapes into compositions using collage, which show a good awareness of negative and positive shapes; and explore ways of cutting, sticking and joining paper. They are able to manipulate imagery from printed sources to produce greetings cards and poster designs. At GCSE, evidence from the work of past candidates shows that Year 11 pupils produce a range of preparatory work on a chosen theme that shows the development of their ideas. They are able to combine imagery and experiment with composition. They apply tone and colour effectively and make some use of the work of other artists in their own work. All pupils present their work exceptionally well, making very good use of the centre's facilities for laminating finished pieces.

Humanities

14. During the inspection, history was taught within the 'Moving Forward' theme of the new humanities curriculum. Although it was possible to observe only two history lessons, there was enough evidence from discussion with the co-ordinator and from scrutiny of planning and pupils' work to make secure judgements about pupils' achievement. Pupils' work demonstrates that they make satisfactory progress overall. Most make good progress in their understanding of chronological events and in learning about some major events in history, but those whose attendance is poor are not making enough progress. In one history lesson, Year 9 pupils made good progress in their knowledge of events leading up to the First World War and in their concept of Empire.

In a Year 10 history lesson, progress was no more than satisfactory because pupils' learning was limited by an inappropriate cutting out task, which did not challenge their understanding sufficiently. Scrutiny of pupils' work shows that they are being encouraged to consider philosophical questions such as the distinction between illusion and reality, and are gaining in their knowledge of beliefs.

Information and communication technology

15. Pupils who attend regularly are making good progress, particularly in Year 10. Those with poor attendance are underachieving. Pupils study for AQA Unit Awards and are learning how to enhance text with borders, columns, coloured fonts in different styles and sizes, wallpaper effects and bullet points. They acquire these skills effectively because they are taught well.
16. On the other hand, the progress of pupils in Year 9 is variable. One lower-attaining pupil makes good progress because he concentrates on his work and enjoys using the computer. He has used PowerPoint to produce interesting slides on the life cycle of a frog and during the inspection he used a paint program to design a poster showing road signs. A more disruptive average-attaining pupil made unsatisfactory progress in the same lesson, because his behaviour was not managed well enough. Although he achieved the objectives set for him, the pupil did not focus sufficiently on his work and did not follow the teacher's instructions to use the keyboard appropriately.
17. Pupils in Year 11 make good progress towards gaining the Certificate of Achievement because the teacher encourages them to select their own topics to create computer-generated text. Consequently, they work hard, remain focused and take a pride in the work they have produced. They make good progress in opening and closing files, inserting clip art, moving images in front of and behind text, and changing fonts to various sizes and styles. Opportunities to extend the achievement of higher-attaining pupils in Year 11 are limited because currently no GCSE course is offered.

Personal, social and health education and Citizenship

18. Pupils' work shows that they are involved in discussions that cover a range of relevant topics and that they receive support in reaching a more positive view of themselves. However, no personal, social and health education lessons took place during the inspection and the limited amount of written work makes it impossible to judge standards. It can be inferred that pupils are making good progress in their understanding from the topics they have researched on the Internet, resulting in a large body of printouts from various websites along with teacher-generated notes. Through this process, pupils are being exposed to some sensitive and well-chosen material, such as powerful poetry on eating disorders. They are learning about mental health; how to cope in an emergency; conflict resolution; consumer rights; drugs, alcohol and smoking; marriage and relationships; and aspects of society such as the European Community and government spending. The eldest pupils are able to present evidence for and against a particular point of view, and discussion in English of issues around the legalisation of cannabis showed that pupils' are satisfactorily informed.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

19. Most pupils are enthusiastic about coming to the centre. They respect and appreciate the help and support they receive from the staff and some have made significant progress in moderating their behaviour in their time at the centre. This progress results in successful reintegration into mainstream schools by several pupils each year. Most

pupils present during the inspection showed good attitudes to learning and their behaviour was good. They are aware of the behavioural targets in their individual plans and the need to maintain good behaviour to reap rewards. One or two pupils, though, did not behave well and records show that some pupils, who were not present during the inspection, behave inappropriately and present challenging behaviour.

20. In lessons, most pupils are enthusiastic learners who listen and respond well and are keen to participate. They are taught in very small groups where they are given a lot of individual attention; most co-operate well, show respect and listen to others. This was clearly evident in a Year 10 mathematics lesson in which the two pupils were patient and helpful to each other, encouraged by the high expectations of the teacher and learning support assistant. They worked hard throughout and achieved a great deal in the time available. Most pupils settle to work reasonably quickly at the beginning of lessons and concentrate well on individual or group tasks. However, there are one or two pupils whose attention seeking, poor concentration and unnecessarily loud comments disrupt lessons when the teachers are not firm enough in their approach and allow them too much leeway. This in turn affects the learning of others.
21. The relationships built up between staff and pupils are good. Teachers and learning support assistants have a good rapport with pupils, who respond well and mostly with respect. Pupils have limited opportunities to socialise with their peers – although more than at the time of the last inspection – but most show some improvement in their understanding of how their actions impact on others. However, for one or two there are insufficient reminders of what is acceptable social behaviour. Where such reminders are used well, they have a very positive effect; for instance, during a break period a learning support assistant was a very good role model for pupils, showing them how they can benefit from forming positive relationships with each other. There are occasional examples of pupils appreciating each other's achievements when stars are given at the end of the lesson, but most seem only interested in their own tally of stars. Pupils treat their surroundings with respect and there is no evidence of wilful damage or graffiti. There are few opportunities for pupils to take responsibility for their own learning within the centre as the approach is largely teacher-directed. An exception to this is in information and communication technology where pupils are actively encouraged to use their recently acquired skills to further their own learning through exploring the Internet or gaining information from CD-ROMs. They enjoy these opportunities to use their own initiative; most cope very well and can be trusted to act appropriately.
22. The vast majority of pupils make good progress in their personal development, especially in terms of increasing their self-esteem and confidence, which are often areas of weakness when they arrive. This was confirmed as one of the centre's strengths by a carer at the parents' meeting before the inspection. She cited the significant progress made by two children and praised the way staff and parents work together to reinforce the same message at home and school. The same carer spoke of the positive benefits on behaviour and attitudes of the new 25-hour week this term. Although there are positive indications for some pupils, the evidence is inconclusive after just one week.
23. There were no exclusions during the last school year. There was no evidence of bullying during the inspection but records show that occasional incidents do happen. However, there are few opportunities for bullying because during the day pupils are engaged full time in lessons or short breaks with constant adult supervision.
24. Attendance is unsatisfactory. Although the attendance of some pupils shows significant improvement and a number of pupils attend regularly, the rate of unauthorised absence

is unacceptably high. In the past year, the attendance of a small number of pupils in Years 10 and 11, some of whom have now moved on, was poor. This was particularly the case in Year 11, where early signs this term show that there is still a problem. A number of pupils in all year groups were absent during the inspection. Punctuality is satisfactory for the majority who attend regularly and most lessons start on time.

25. There have been no significant changes in attitudes, behaviour and attendance overall since the last inspection but, as previously stated, there has been significant improvement for some individual pupils. This improvement has a positive impact on their learning and progress and encourages a more responsible attitude than they showed previously. The tolerant approach of some teachers to the poor behaviour of a few pupils is hindering the overall rate of improvement.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS TAUGHT?

26. At the time of the last inspection, teaching was satisfactory, with a limited amount of good teaching; very good teaching occurred almost exclusively in art. There were distinct shortcomings in a number of lessons in most other subjects, often related to lack of subject specialist knowledge; this resulted in heavy reliance on textbooks and worksheets. In the worst lessons, teaching was dull and there was little or no real communication between the teacher and pupils. Limited or ineffective behaviour management was evident in a minority of lessons, and there were weaknesses in the teaching of basic skills of literacy and numeracy. Oral feedback and some marking were helpful, but work was often marked too quickly and mistakes ignored. These shortcomings stemmed largely from the unsatisfactory staffing arrangements: subject co-ordinators were not established and teachers were employed on hourly contracts.
27. In the last year, the centre has seen the establishment of a teaching staff on permanent contracts, with subject specialists co-ordinating most subjects. This has led to a distinct improvement in the quality of teaching, and to the addressing of some but not all of the shortcomings found at the last inspection. Teaching is now good in Year 9 and in Years 10 and 11 and there was no unsatisfactory teaching seen during the inspection. There has been an increase in the amount of teaching that is very good: this is the case in roughly a third of lessons now, with consistently very good teaching in art and some very good teaching in mathematics and science. Teaching during the inspection was good in English, although scrutiny of pupils' work shows that teaching in recent months has been satisfactory rather than good. Teaching is good overall in most other subjects.
28. Where teaching is satisfactory, there are some good features but there is also a lack of firmness in teachers' management of challenging behaviour and their expectations are not as high as they should be, as evidenced by the work set and the level of challenge within questioning and activities. Good subject knowledge enables teachers to make use of a variety of teaching methods and to be more effective in communicating with pupils and in stimulating them than was the case at the time of the last inspection, even though teaching groups remain small (not more than two pupils were present in any class).

English

29. During the inspection, teaching was good overall. A scrutiny of pupils' work over recent months shows satisfactory teaching, but this difference is explained by the recent appointment of an assistant head of centre who has also taken over the role of English co-ordinator and who is now the main teacher of the subject.

30. The best teaching is purposeful and focused. In a Year 10 lesson, the teacher related learning effectively to pupils' prior attainment, shared objectives and methods with the pupils, and combined challenge and encouragement appropriately. Her questioning and relationship with the pupils were good, whilst planning was satisfactory. Planning focused on activities rather than identifying what the teacher expected each pupil to learn; this partly reflects the fact that more work is yet to be done on ensuring that lessons contain the material pupils most need to learn. In a Year 9 lesson, the teacher's enthusiasm enabled her to keep up the momentum although only one pupil was present. She used a variety of methods to keep the pupil stimulated and openly shared her own frightening experiences as a means of encouraging the pupil to talk more readily about his own. She asked good questions to elicit further ideas from him. In return, he remained on task and showed interest in learning, although he tended to be dependent on the teacher. In another Year 9 lesson, the teacher's planning was good, she chose appropriate methods and asked effective questions. The perpetual chatter of one pupil was ignored, however, and the teacher missed the opportunity to challenge pupils to think more deeply about what constitutes a hero. As a result, a lesson that was good in many respects only led to quite a limited amount of new knowledge and did not make the contribution that it could have done to personal development. A drama lesson, where Year 9 and Year 10 pupils came together to form a larger class, was thoroughly planned and warm-up activities were appropriate as a means of breaking through pupils' initial embarrassment. However, the choice of fairy tales as a subject for group work was not motivating to pupils and their behaviour – especially that of a Year 9 pupil who sought to control activities – was not managed well.
31. In English and in other subjects of the curriculum, teachers do not correct pupils' spelling mistakes or punctuation consistently enough. They praise positive aspects of a piece of work but do not communicate to pupils what they need to do to improve. Even where technical vocabulary, such as 'circuit' for 'circuit' or 'measure' for 'measure' in science, is spelt incorrectly, the correct spelling is not provided. More needs to be done to ensure that all teachers support the development of pupils' literacy skills. The impact of the Key Stage 3 Literacy Strategy is not yet much evident within teaching, and teachers tend to focus rather too much on speaking and listening, missing some important opportunities to extend pupils' writing skills. Since there is little pressure on pupils to complete homework, they are producing a smaller body of written work than they need to do if they hope to gain higher grades at GCSE.

Mathematics

32. The quality of teaching is good and in some lessons it is very good. This ensures that pupils are learning and achieving well. Where teaching is good, the teacher maintains good relationships with pupils so that they show respect, listen to what is said, behave well and follow instructions. She provides good links with prior learning so that pupils build systematically on their knowledge and skills. The teacher also provides effective feedback to pupils in lessons, especially by marking work consistently so that pupils know exactly how much progress they are making. Lessons are always lively and this encourages pupils to work productively and concentrate on their activities. However, the teacher misses some opportunities to develop pupils' information and communication technology skills and to use computers in enhancing their mathematical skills, for example in handling and recording data. In lessons where teaching is very good, the teacher uses praise well and sets high expectations for behaviour, accuracy of work and presentation. As a result, pupils produce neat work and take a pride in their achievements. Other features of very good teaching are the thorough preparation and planning of the lesson, and very good questioning. Both features ensure that pupils of

all abilities are taught well, and quickly acquire new knowledge, understanding and skills. Numeracy is effectively taught in mathematics lessons and in some other subjects, such as science.

Science

33. The quality of teaching is good overall and sometimes very good. This represents good improvement since the last inspection, where teaching was judged to be satisfactory. Where teaching is good, lessons are well planned with clear learning objectives which cater for the needs of pupils of all abilities. This ensures that pupils know what is expected of them, learn at their own pace and achieve well. The teacher provides good opportunities for using computers, especially for recording experimental data. This not only improves pupils' skills of scientific enquiry but also enhances their numeracy skills. The teacher makes good use of her knowledge of pupils' achievements in lessons in order to move them forward in their learning. Pupils therefore acquire new knowledge and skills effectively. The teacher maintains good relationships with pupils so that they show respect, try hard and finish the tasks that have been set for them. Where teaching is very good, the teacher pays particular attention to promoting pupils' personal development. Pupils reflect on their investigations in order to link cause and effect, for example in considering why electrical resistance varies in different circuits. The teacher also draws pupils' attention to safety in practical investigations so that they know the difference between the right way and the wrong way of conducting an experiment and abide by this. Literacy skills are very well promoted where teaching is very good. For example, giving pupils opportunities to fill in missing words in sentences enhanced their understanding of the nucleus in an atom.

Art and design

34. Teaching is of very good quality, as reported at the time of the last inspection. Lesson planning is exemplary: learning objectives are precisely tailored to the needs of individual pupils and activities are chosen to fit the intended learning outcome. The teacher has excellent communication skills and develops pupils' speaking and listening skills through engaging them in meaningful conversations around aspects of their work. As a result, many pupils are making excellent progress in their personal development in art, gaining in their ability to be patient, to concentrate and to apply themselves, as well as growing in self-respect. In a Year 11 lesson, the teacher was extremely skilled in drawing out a pupil's ability to analyse an advertisement and to talk about pop art images. The teacher dropped in many incidental questions that prompted the pupil to make observations without really realising he was doing anything; this was particularly significant because the pupil was clearly quite a dependent learner who would not easily venture an opinion. By introducing some of his own work – as a practising artist – into the discussion, the teacher then skilfully led the pupil to an understanding of the role of the viewer in a work of art, linking this to the piece of work the pupil had been analysing. A pupil in Year 9, who is new to the centre and who presented problems in some other subjects, talked animatedly with the teacher in response to visual reference materials, whilst the teacher injected humour and kept the pupil's focus throughout. It is clear that the teacher has quickly gained his trust and respect. Pupils in Year 10 are working hard and concentrate very well. They have high expectations for themselves, want their work to be finished neatly and express pride about the number of AQA Unit Awards they have already completed.

Humanities

35. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. In a Year 9 lesson about the First World War, teaching was good and enabled pupils to learn well. The teacher set clear targets for presentation of written work at the beginning of the lesson, which promoted literacy skills very well, setting high expectations for pupils' learning so that they gained new knowledge quickly and increased their understanding of chronological events. Behaviour was managed well so that a disruptive pupil was quickly refocused on the task, worked harder and made good progress by the end of the lesson. In a Year 10 lesson, teaching was satisfactory rather than good because the teacher's expectations were not as high as they could have been and pupils were not challenged to engage with the topic in sufficient depth.

Information and communication technology

36. The quality of teaching is good, enabling pupils to learn well and make good progress in lessons. In two out of the three lessons seen, teaching was good and in the other lesson it was satisfactory. Particular strengths include very good opportunities provided by the teacher for using computers, – for example in researching on the Internet. This enables pupils to generate high quality work. Other strong features are the good relationships the teacher maintains with pupils, so that they show respect, and the good targeted support that ensures individual pupils' misunderstandings are clarified. In a satisfactory lesson, the disruptive behaviour of one pupil was not managed well enough and this had some impact on the learning of both pupils. The teacher did not insist that the pupil followed her instructions and did not make use of any sanctions when he ignored her requests.

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

37. At the time of the last inspection, provision was well structured to support the reintegration of pupils placed short term at the centre. For those attending over a longer period of time, the curriculum was unsatisfactory. There were serious weaknesses in the overall planning of the curriculum, largely due to staffing arrangements, with no subject co-ordinator except in art. Lessons of two hours duration were too long and the total taught time per pupil was typically limited to ten hours a week. The curriculum for Year 11 phobics was extremely narrow. All pupils had been on the register of special educational needs at mainstream school before joining the centre, but there was no teacher with overall responsibility for special educational needs or with expertise in dealing with pupils with learning difficulties. There were weaknesses in the diagnosis of learning difficulties and there was no overall system of individual target setting except for pupils with statements of special educational needs. Opportunities for extra-curricular activities were very limited, but the centre worked closely with a large number of mainstream schools as a result of its involvement in preventative outreach support.
38. Since the last inspection, there has been substantial improvement in curriculum provision as a result of the national move to full-time placement from September 2002 for pupils who have been excluded permanently from mainstream schools. The local education authority increased provision to fifteen hours a week over the past year, as a gradual transition from the previous ten hours, in readiness for introducing full-time provision this term. This has enabled the first weeks of term to run smoothly, and the move to full-time provision is giving rise already to a much-needed increase in the range of learning opportunities open to pupils. Curriculum provision is now good and the centre is fulfilling curricular requirements for pupil referral units.

39. The centre's effectiveness in returning approximately half its pupils to mainstream school is underpinned by a curriculum that is suited well to the needs of this group. For pupils in Years 7 to 9 and those who arrive in the first term of Year 10, and who are expected to return to mainstream school, the focus is on developing their competence within basic skills and improving any areas of weakness. They are taught English, mathematics and science, art, information and communication technology, humanities (history, geography and religious education), personal, social and health education, and citizenship. Physical education has been introduced this term. Pupils are attending a local centre for sailing on a weekly basis. There are plans to increase the range of outdoor and physical activities, for example to include golf and swimming during the course of the year.
40. For pupils in Years 10 and 11 who will not be returning to mainstream school, there is an appropriate emphasis on providing access to GCSE, Certificates of Achievement and AQA Unit Awards as well as on preparing pupils for life after compulsory school age. The Youth Programmes Unit has overall responsibility for the curriculum programme for these pupils, offering modules that take place on youth service premises and complement the academic focus of the centre. Within this programme, the centre provides access to GCSE courses for a maximum of four Year 11 pupils through a weekly ten-hour placement (two hours per day). This is insufficient time to cover the four GCSE courses currently offered, along with alternative accreditation in information and communication technology, so the Youth Programmes Unit makes additional study time available for this group. This is a perfectly reasonable arrangement but requires much closer curriculum collaboration and communication than currently exists between the centre and the Youth Programmes Unit. Centre staff have taken on responsibility for providing examination courses, but have not set up arrangements for detailed on-going liaison about pupils' progress and about the nature of work that needs to be supported by Youth Programmes Unit staff. At present, liaison focuses almost exclusively on the personal development of the pupils rather than on their academic work. The absence of close communication on academic progress and direction about the nature of support needed may be a contributory factor in the poor attendance of some Year 11 pupils.
41. Curriculum planning is satisfactory. Some schemes of work are fully in place, but in most subjects recently appointed subject co-ordinators are engaged in planning or in making adjustments to those schemes that already exist. A scheme of work exists in English but this is not reflected in pupils' work over past months, which suggests a much narrower curriculum in practice than that evident in the planning. Not enough attention is given to addressing the needs of pupils with literacy difficulties and to ensuring that the reading and writing skills of all pupils are sufficiently developed. The mathematics curriculum is now good. The co-ordinator has begun to implement the Key Stage 3 Strategy and has provided a range of external examination courses from Unit Awards to GCSE, so that pupils of all abilities can achieve their potential. A good deal of work has been undertaken successfully in science to improve the curriculum, which was very narrow at the time of the last inspection. In art, the teacher is using the AQA Unit Awards very effectively to structure the curriculum and to motivate pupils. The short, sharp nature of these units sustains pupils' interest very well, and the curriculum provides progression from unit awards, through to the Certificate of Achievement and GCSE.
42. The centre has identified the need to develop further the integrated humanities curriculum; coherent plans are already in place for pupils in Years 7 to 9. Themes last for six weeks, incorporating elements of history, geography and religious education, and are based on the National Curriculum modules. They therefore thoroughly prepare pupils for reintegration into mainstream school. The humanities curriculum in Years 10

and 11 is not yet fully developed, although the Certificate of Achievement in history has just been introduced in Year 10.

43. In information and communication technology, the curriculum is well thought out with increased opportunities for pupils to gain accreditation in Years 10 and 11. Although the centre has previously offered a GCSE course to Year 11 pupils, it has experienced difficulties recently with the syllabus and is now intending to introduce the CLAIT award as well as a new GCSE syllabus. Pupils have limited opportunities to develop their information and communication technology skills within subjects, although this aspect has improved since the last inspection. For example, in science pupils make good progress in the use of Excel to record data in their investigations, and in art pupils are developing their use of skills in manipulating imagery and in combining text and graphics. In personal, social and health education, pupils use the Internet a good deal to locate and print information about particular topics but they do not use this information to develop written work of their own. There is some use of computers in English, including use of the Internet and word-processing, but little evidence of their use in mathematics. The co-ordinator is aware of the need to check subject planning more rigorously to ensure that opportunities for using computers are embedded in planning and of the need to monitor other teachers' use of computers within their lessons.
44. The personal, social and health education curriculum is good. It is well planned and, with the recent introduction of citizenship, pupils are being taught a range of skills and are learning about a range of important topics that affect their current and future wellbeing. There is a sex education policy and a recently drafted drugs education policy; these elements are covered appropriately within personal, social and health education and science.
45. Careers provision is good within the centre for pupils up to Year 10. The Youth Programmes Unit has responsibility for careers guidance for Year 11 pupils. The recently appointed personal, social and health education co-ordinator takes her role very seriously and has established careers guidance as a key element in the personal, social and health education curriculum. The emphasis is on educating pupils to make informed choices based on their abilities and interests. Other aspects such as financial budgeting are also included. Professionals with careers reflecting the pupils' interests are to be invited into the centre to give the pupils more firsthand knowledge and experience. A link with a local secondary school to enable pupils to share taster sessions is planned for this year.
46. There have been limited opportunities for pupils to take part in extra-curricular activities, partly because they have only just begun to attend full time and the centre has only recently gained a teaching staff paid on other than an hourly rate. Pupils have had the opportunity to go on some trips – for example, to the theatre and the cinema – but the centre has yet to provide a breadth of activity beyond that available within normal curriculum time to extend pupils' experiences.
47. Similarly, the centre has not yet found ways of involving pupils in the life of the community or of using the community to enrich the curriculum. It does, however, continue to have very close links with a substantial number of mainstream schools as a consequence of the behaviour support team being based at the centre. The close relationship that results from staff involvement in preventative outreach work and the liaison with a number of secondary schools make a major contribution to pupils' progress and to the centre's overall effectiveness. The centre also liaises with a number of local schools who provide support with subject knowledge and through the head of centre's participation in the secondary school headteachers' group. The centre

has a special link with a nearby secondary school to support science teaching, from whom it borrows specialist equipment and chemicals. Another secondary headteacher is now chair of the management committee. There are close working links with other education support centres in the local authority. The recently appointed careers co-ordinator is working hard to extend links with local businesses and services such as the police and fire brigade.

Pupils' personal development

48. Provision for pupils' spiritual development is satisfactory. Although there are limited planned opportunities for whole-centre reflection there are more opportunities within subjects and during the informal gatherings at break times in the morning than at the time of the last inspection. In science, pupils reflect on cause and effect during their investigations; in personal, social and health education, they have some opportunity to consider the feelings of others, for instance in their study of eating disorders. The centre is very effective in improving pupils' self-esteem and builds up their confidence. This enables them to develop a more mature response to their learning. Registration sessions make a meaningful contribution to provision for personal development, showing pupils that their experiences are valued. However, opportunities for spiritual development within subjects are not planned for sufficiently.
49. Provision for pupils' moral development is good. Staff discuss moral issues with pupils and challenge stereotyped attitudes. For example, a learning support assistant provided excellent challenge to a pupil for laughing during a discussion about child prostitution, making him aware of the ignorance of his response. Pupils' moral development is also well promoted by the good role models for behaviour which staff provide. As a result, most pupils know the difference between right and wrong. Many pupils learn to control their own behaviour. However, a few do not make sufficient improvement in their behaviour in lessons because some teachers are not firm enough. For example, one pupil continually disrupted a number of lessons by talking continuously and, at times, refusing to follow instructions. A few teachers pleaded with him to stop, or simply allowed him to call the tune, instead of being firm and insisting on more acceptable behaviour or applying sanctions. This pupil, therefore, was not helped to develop a sense of right and wrong.
50. Provision for pupils' social development is now good and has improved since the last inspection, when it was judged to be only satisfactory. There are now planned meeting times in the mornings where pupils socialise with staff. This develops pupils' maturity and increases their ability to take turns in discussion and to share. There are also more opportunities for pupils to work collaboratively in classrooms. For example, in science, pupils were seen sharing their own ideas on making circuits and in drama, two year classes came together. Pupils are encouraged to work independently more than at the time of the last inspection. For example, in nearly every mathematics lesson seen, the teacher structured the lesson to ensure that all pupils worked quietly by themselves for a part of the lesson, taking more responsibility for their own learning.
51. Provision for pupils' cultural development is still only satisfactory as there are too few opportunities for pupils to learn about and experience cultures that are different from their own. Planning for religious education shows that pupils consider different faiths and religious traditions, such as Islam and Judaism. However, this is not evident in their work and there are no displays within the centre that celebrate cultural diversity or inform pupils about life in other parts of the world. In art, the study of the work of other artists is still a strong feature and pupils have had some opportunities to go on trips to the theatre and to the cinema to support the study of English.

HOW WELL DOES THE UNIT CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

Care

52. The staff of the centre look after the pupils well. They are taught in small groups, often with one-to-one help, and given a great deal of personal attention. Staff are trained in first aid as a matter of course; new staff have yet to complete this training. Likewise, staff are made aware of child protection guidelines, and the centre has secure procedures for dealing with this. Recently arrived staff have yet to undergo training arranged through the educational psychologist, who is very supportive of the centre's work. There is good liaison with a range of care professionals and other agencies, as well as extensive contact with schools through the outreach service. This contact serves as a very effective means of supporting pupils who are integrating or being prepared for reintegration into mainstream school.
53. Attendance is monitored and analysed thoroughly and regularly using electronically generated data. Absences are followed up within 30 minutes of the start of the day in which they occur. There are good links with the educational welfare officers who are notified as soon as a pupil has missed four sessions. The attendance of Year 11 pupils is the responsibility of the Youth Programmes Unit, so the centre lacks overall control of the attendance of these pupils. Good attendance is rewarded each term with certificates, and the importance of regular attendance is highlighted in the new parent information booklet. However, the centre does not set targets for pupils to improve their attendance; nor does it link rewards for attendance to specific improvements.
54. Monitoring of behaviour is unsatisfactory. Regular monitoring takes place by teachers in lessons and the special educational needs co-ordinator monitors pupils' individual education plans. Incidents are recorded in a separate book but there is no evidence, within these records, of action taken to address poor behaviour or of the sanctions imposed. It is therefore difficult for all staff to have an up-to-date overview of pupils' behaviour. The recently revised behaviour policy sets out a sensible code of conduct. It includes a framework for managing behaviour, but does not ensure a consistent approach by all staff, since it leaves each teacher to decide on appropriate sanctions. Staff meet regularly to discuss individual pupils causing concern, in an attempt to reach an agreed method for tackling their difficulties. As several teachers work part time, they are not necessarily party to this information. Furthermore, a meeting of this type during the inspection, concerning a pupil with challenging behaviour, did not subsequently lead to effective management of his behaviour. Evidence was seen during the inspection of the detrimental effect of one or two pupils' behaviour where some teachers' expectations were lower than others. Teachers generally are not adopting a firm enough stance nor setting sufficiently high expectations to reduce challenging behaviour. They would be better supported if the behaviour policy set out clear procedures for dealing with particular types of incident, so that sanctions could be systematically and consistently applied. The 'no blame' approach to bullying adopted by the centre is not supported by guidance to teachers on specific action to be taken when bullying occurs; it simply states that counselling will be provided to both parties.
55. There is greater consistency in the monitoring and promotion of personal development, which is good. Teachers know the pupils well and place a high priority on increasing self-esteem and confidence. The new personal, social and health education curriculum has been well thought through and enhances the provision for personal development. A newly introduced system involves pupils and teachers in the assessment of pupils' personal development. This raises probing questions about pupils' motivation and

progress, and once fully underway, the system should provide a wealth of information about pupils' personal development.

56. Health and safety audits are undertaken regularly, though the policy is to be reviewed this term following a county review, which highlighted some areas for concern. This has been acted upon, though there are still some outstanding issues regarding the inspection of fire equipment. No major health and safety concerns were noted during the inspection.

Assessment

57. There has been insufficient progress in assessment and recording since the last inspection, when the centre's procedures were judged to be unsatisfactory. Despite improvements in assessment and recording in some subjects, there are important gaps in pupils' records and teachers are not all systematically assessing and recording pupils' attainment in a way that enables academic progress to be monitored. Assessment and recording of pupils' behaviour and personal development are good; shortcomings in practice relate almost exclusively to the assessment of pupils' academic attainment and progress. Good systems listed in the special educational needs policy and in the recently drafted assessment, recording and reporting policy are not yet fully evident in practice. The latter policy provides some useful guidance to staff but gives individual teachers too much freedom to interpret the policy in different ways; it does not ensure that all teachers will meet the same standard in their assessment and record keeping.
58. Baseline assessments are now in place but these are at an early stage of development as essential information to aid planning is not always available to staff. The centre continues to experience difficulty obtaining information from pupils' previous schools about their prior attainment but is now using the services of the local education authority to improve the process. It is intended that information will be collected about pupils' performance in cognitive ability tests and in National Curriculum tests, but the collection of this information directly from the local education authority is not yet underway. Evidence from assessment records demonstrates good checking of pupils' personal development. Staff have access to an assessment folder completed for each pupil which includes detailed information on his or her personal and social development.
59. The appointment of a special educational needs co-ordinator ensures that all pupils have targets for literacy and numeracy in their individual education plans, along with targets for personal development. However, these targets are often imprecise and so it is very difficult to determine how much progress pupils are making. Individual education plans are reviewed each term and new targets are set; this represents good practice. The co-ordinator has recently introduced a new system for the assessment of literacy but this has yet to be fully implemented. Diagnostic assessment systems – for example, to determine strengths and weaknesses in spelling – are still not in place and, thus, the situation remains unsatisfactory. Even where pupils have distinct literacy difficulties they are not being tested frequently enough to assess their attainment – for instance, in reading – and so their progress cannot be effectively monitored.
60. Assessment systems are well developed in mathematics and used effectively for planning. For example, pupils contribute to their own profile sheet which records how well they are progressing. National Curriculum test papers and systematic observation are used to determine pupils' attainment on entry. The results are then used to inform the numeracy targets set for each pupil. Assessment systems have improved in science and are now satisfactory: new systems have been introduced to determine how

well pupils are acquiring scientific skills in relation to the National Curriculum but not all the records are completed for all pupils. The science co-ordinator is rightly aware that target setting needs to be introduced so that pupils have a much tighter focus on what they are expected to learn. Pupils' attainment is regularly assessed in art. The curriculum is closely aligned with the AQA Unit Awards and records are kept showing pupils' progress within each unit. The teacher has devised excellent assessment materials for GCSE, including a very well designed self-evaluation sheet. Exemplar folders are being developed to support the teaching of each AQA Unit Award, and the teacher shares with pupils the examination criteria for achieving particular grades at GCSE, so that they are well aware of what is required of them. In humanities, the co-ordinator has developed a good record-keeping system to demonstrate pupils' gains in knowledge and understanding at the end of each lesson, but schemes of work are still being developed in Years 10 and 11, so assessment is not fully in place yet. In information and communication technology, assessment systems are well developed in Years 10 and 11, with very good involvement of pupils in recording their own progress. However, assessment in Years 7 to 9 is unsatisfactory as there is no evidence of assessment records for the current Year 9 pupils.

61. There has been insufficient development of assessment systems for recording pupils' attainment or checking their progress in English. Staff were only able to find a limited amount of assessment information for English during the inspection. When the newly appointed English co-ordinator was appointed, there was no formal handing over of assessment records and there is little coherent information on pupils' attainment or progress in English in their central records. This is an important omission and makes the monitoring of pupils' progress impossible.
62. Even in subjects where teachers' own assessment records are kept up to date, there are important gaps in information held centrally about pupils' attainment and progress. There are no effective central profiles of pupils' overall attainment because most teachers have not been in the habit of adding information regularly to ensure an effective record is kept. Gaps in recording mean that – with the exception of art where records are complete – teachers are not in a position to use assessment information in planning, monitoring or in organising support for individual pupils.

HOW WELL DOES THE UNIT WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

63. The centre works well in partnership with parents, as it did at the time of the last inspection. The head of centre rightly sees partnership with parents as a vital component in pupils' progress and in the reinforcement of positive attitudes at home.
64. Information about parents' and carers' views is limited as there were no responses to the parents' questionnaire and only one pupil's carers attended the parents' meeting. They are very appreciative of the support provided by the centre. In particular, they praise the way that pupils work and concentrate better in the small classes. They believe that the centre promotes very good attitudes and values, and feel that the approach to behaviour management at the centre supports improved behaviour at home. They find staff very approachable and willing to discuss any problems. They are happy with the progress the child in their care is making and spoke positively about the new 25-hour week, which they feel is much needed to give a wider range of subjects and to ease reintegration into mainstream school. Further evidence from conversations amongst a small number of parents during the inspection confirmed these positive views. Parents suggested that having a playground would better support pupils' social development and expressed some uncertainty about expectations for homework.

65. Inspectors' judgements support the view that pupils benefit from working in the small classes provided at the centre. Appropriate attention is paid to promoting positive attitudes, but the management of behaviour is not consistent: the behaviour of challenging pupils is not always managed as well as it could be. Staff are approachable and more than willing to support parents. Whilst an outdoor play area would be a useful addition to the centre's accommodation, it is not usual for pupil referral units to have outdoor playgrounds. The introduction of physical education to the curriculum means that pupils are now having the opportunity to develop physical skills in an outdoor environment and to work as part of a team. The centre has a policy which states that homework should be set regularly but staff have met with limited success in motivating pupils to complete it. The head of centre reports that staff find following up uncompleted homework time-consuming. They have chosen to place their emphasis on pupils' effort during the day with the introduction of the new 25-hour week and to review the question of homework when this is fully established. In the meantime, pupils would doubtlessly make better progress in the amount of work they cover and in the development of their learning skills if homework were promoted more actively and if it were set regularly for everyone.
66. Since the last inspection, the centre has continued to involve parents and carers in decisions about their children. Parents support the work of the centre by regularly attending annual reviews and contributing to them positively for the pupils' benefit. Parents are generally keen to work with staff to ensure that their children make progress. The centre, in its turn, welcomes parents and makes them feel involved. Parents are invited to visit or telephone the centre at any time. Staff regularly contact them and the head of centre rings to inform them of any incidents during the day, which may affect a pupil's behaviour at home.
67. More formal information for parents is at present satisfactory in most respects. The centre is in the process of developing an information pack, which will be available after half term. This will provide reference material for parents that is needed if they are to contribute more actively to their children's education. A newsletter has been introduced this term, which is still in experimental form but is a positive development. The intention is that it will contain contributions from pupils as well as information on events, visits, and so on. The recent drive to improve the quality of information to parents is necessary to keep parents fully informed.
68. At present, the centre provides a written annual report only to pupils who have spent a whole year at the centre. Since pupils are not necessarily admitted at the beginning of an academic year, this means that parents can be left with no formal record of their child's progress. At the end of the last year, only one pupil had a report issued because others had started at the centre during the academic year. This represents unsatisfactory practice, since it leaves most parents 'in the dark' about how their children are doing and too dependent on informal feedback. Annual reports give brief information on the work covered and progress made. They include targets for each subject but these are mostly related to personal development rather than to attainment. Reports give insufficient information on what pupils know, understand and can do and how they can improve their performance within each subject. A new format to the reports is an improvement but they still require more detail. There has been insufficient improvement in reporting to parents since the last inspection and weaknesses in formal reports reflect those also apparent in some aspects of assessment and record keeping.

HOW WELL IS THE UNIT LED AND MANAGED?

69. At the time of the last inspection, the head of centre provided good day-to-day management of the centre, so that it ran smoothly and efficiently. Outreach support and systems for the reintegration of pupils into mainstream school were effectively managed. However, there were serious weaknesses in the leadership and management of provision for pupils who had been attending the centre for a longer period of time: these weaknesses stemmed mainly from unsatisfactory staffing arrangements. The arrangements, whereby teachers were paid on an hourly rate, impacted adversely on pupils' achievement. Local education authority documentation was of high quality and many useful systems were in place, linking the centre, mainstream schools and other services.
70. Since the last inspection, there has been satisfactory improvement in the leadership and management of the centre. Day-to-day management remains good, enabling it to function smoothly. The head has been effective in leading the centre through significant improvements in staffing and preparing for the recent introduction of full-time provision. Many aspects of the centre's work are in a state of transition, with several recently appointed staff and some new or revised systems. Too many aspects of organisation remain informal, as identified by the local education authority's 2001 review. In order to take the centre forward, it is necessary for the head of centre and others with leadership and management responsibilities to set high expectations for staff and pupils alike, to ensure that policies provide clear guidance to staff, and to establish rigorous systems for monitoring all aspects of provision and evaluating the centre's overall effectiveness.
71. The staffing arrangements now support potentially improved leadership and management. The senior management team has been restructured, so that as well as the head of centre and deputy (who manages the outreach programme and does not teach in the centre), there is a recently appointed assistant head who co-ordinates English and is taking on responsibility for curriculum organisation, assessment, recording and reporting, monitoring and evaluation, and performance management of centre teaching staff. A regular programme of senior management team meetings has been established from the beginning of this term, alongside meetings for staff and the outreach team. Appointment of the assistant head means that someone with direct management responsibility will be on site at all times.
72. English has a newly appointed co-ordinator, and thus it is too early to judge the effectiveness of leadership within English. Mathematics is led well and since the last inspection there has been good improvement in some procedures. Science is led well by an experienced and suitably qualified co-ordinator who has established clear priorities for development. Art continues to be led very well: the subject has sustained the strengths reported at the time of the last inspection and the co-ordinator, through becoming an accredited assessor for AQA Unit Awards, is leading the introduction of more Unit Awards across the curriculum. Work that has been done so far in the co-ordination of humanities is good and appropriate priorities for development are being identified. Information and communication technology is led well by an enthusiastic co-ordinator who has continued to improve provision since the last inspection.
73. Monitoring and evaluation are at an early stage of development: since the last inspection, there has been limited improvement in monitoring. Weeks in the school calendar have been set aside for work scrutiny, for observation of teaching and for examination of planning documents. It is intended that the school development adviser should contribute to this monitoring exercise, and this is highly desirable since senior managers lack experience in key activities such as lesson observation. At present, the analysis of outcomes (for example, assessment, attendance, and other performance indicators by age, sex, and pupils' background) is partly but not wholly in place. A

limited amount of monitoring has been undertaken to support the introduction of performance management; otherwise, there has been little direct monitoring of teaching and learning, except that done by the local education authority.

74. The centre's development planning has been sufficiently focused to support change. The main priority for 2002/3 is to implement a new curriculum to meet the needs of 25-hour provision. Other priorities of the development plan have already been met, namely the revised staffing structure, and an extension to the buildings. However, the development plan does not include reference to some national developments, for example the Key Stage 3 Strategy. It is rather more concerned with things that need to be done than with achieving optimum quality – but this partly reflects the fact that many new developments need to be put in place with the move to 25 hours. The local education authority review of 2001 pinpointed the need for subject development plans. These have been established for mathematics and science; although an English development plan has apparently been devised, staff were not able to locate it during the inspection. No development plans have been produced in other subjects and those development plans that do exist are not closely linked to the whole-centre development planning process. At present, much development occurs as a result of staff discussion, through staff access to adviser input and from the developing contacts with mainstream schools. Until internal monitoring is established much more strongly as part of on-going practice, the centre will not be in a position to arrive at a development plan that addresses the improvement of quality in all aspects of its work.
75. The local education authority has provided good support to the centre since the last inspection, including input by the advisers for English, mathematics and science. The head of centre has found the link adviser very supportive and the local authority provided very useful, focused guidance in its November 2001 review of the centre's work. Furthermore, key local authority personnel have worked as part of a group regularly reviewing and discussing the centre's progress. They have been instrumental in making major change possible. A new designated officer (who is the day-to-day line manager for the local education authority quadrant in which the centre falls) has been appointed recently from social services. There is also a lead officer who deals with issues relating to admissions and exclusions. Documentary guidance provided by the local authority remains effective in defining the centre's work and enabling it to operate successfully. The head of centre meets regularly with the designated officer, the chair of the management committee and school development adviser. He also attends regular meetings of the heads of all the education support centres in the authority and so keeps in touch with developments across the authority.
76. The management committee provides good support to the centre, and committee meetings provide an arena in which the centre's work can be discussed and evaluated. The committee includes an appropriate spread of relevant expertise within its membership. The new chair, who is headteacher at a local secondary school, has worked closely with the head of centre on the budget and development plan, and he has a clear understanding of the centre's work. Some other members of the committee visit the centre and have direct experience of its workings. Others are informed about its work by the reports the head of centre provides.

Staffing

77. There has been a very good improvement in staffing arrangements since the last inspection, when the staffing situation was a cause for concern. The appointment of permanent subject specialists, many of whom are able to bring expertise to bear on the co-ordination of subjects, is already having a distinct impact on the quality of teaching.

There has been an increase in the provision of learning support assistants and this, again, is contributing to pupils' learning. Staff morale is necessarily higher than at time of the last inspection, as staff have the certainty that permanent contracts bring.

78. The centre has made satisfactory progress in implementing performance management and will shortly complete its first cycle whereby teachers work to fulfil their individual performance targets. Appropriate procedures have been adopted for setting and reviewing objectives. Systems for identifying professional development needs are satisfactory; the centre has appropriately identified the further development of its support staff as a priority. When new staff begin work at the centre, they receive informal support and meet with colleagues to discuss pupils' needs. There are not sufficient formal procedures, however, for the induction of new staff and this is already giving rise to slippage, for instance in English where essential records have been mislaid.

Accommodation

79. The accommodation is satisfactory for most aspects of the curriculum. In preparation for the introduction of full-time provision, the buildings have been adapted to provide a greater number of smaller teaching areas, each developed for specialist use. For example, in the science room, benches have been added, gas taps are being fitted and chemicals acquired from a mainstream school. There are now designated rooms for English, mathematics, art, information and communication technology and personal, social and health education. In addition, an extension has been built to provide a workspace for the outreach team and an office for the deputy head of centre. The heating is being upgraded – old gas heaters are being removed and replaced by radiators, which will provide more room in classes.
80. However, lack of storage remains an issue in some rooms, for example in the English classroom. The art classroom is somewhat cramped should GCSE pupils opt to work large-scale or in three dimensions. The humanities room is shared with personal, social and health education and although there is enough teaching space, the amount of wall space to display pupils' work is considerably reduced. The accommodation continues to place some restrictions on the social development of pupils; although social development is now good, there is no designated area for pupils to mix socially or for the whole unit to meet. The morning breaks, where pupils are able to get a drink and a snack, take place in a classroom and one of the classes is used for games such as table tennis in the first break of the morning. Staff are making the most of space available to them in this way, but lack of a designated social meeting area limits the type of activities that can be provided and the amount of freedom pupils may be allowed.

Learning resources

81. Learning resources have improved since the last inspection and the centre is now well resourced. This has been brought about by a budget allocation to each subject, so that co-ordinators have been able to equip their classrooms to meet the needs of the curriculum and of the pupils on roll. English is resourced well with a range of books, videos and other learning materials. Mathematics is resourced well with a variety of books, worksheets, games and materials, with the exception of computer software. The co-ordinator is rightly aware that more work needs to be done in developing mental starters for mathematics lessons and in building up more computer software resources to enhance learning. In science, learning resources have improved and are now good. This enables pupils to carry out experiments and use computers to enhance their skills. However, more interactive CD-ROMs would help pupils to further increase their

knowledge and understanding of science. Art is resourced well with consumable materials to support the range of AQA Unit Awards that are taught, and there is a good range of visual reference materials. Resources for humanities have improved and are now good, although there is again a need to increase the number of CD-ROMs for research. The centre is very well resourced for information and communication technology in terms of good quality computers that are networked throughout. The centre does not have a website and pupils do not have their own email addresses; this restricts the progress they make in using the computer for communication. However, teachers and pupils have ready access to the Internet for research. This is effective in supplementing the fairly limited book stock; subscription to the Schools Library Association also supports this where necessary.

Finance

82. The centre uses its income and plans its expenditure in line with the priorities it has identified for improvement. For example, a considerable amount has been spent in refurbishing a classroom and purchasing new resources for teaching science. This has led to significant improvements in the quality of science teaching and learning. Similarly, money has been spent on establishing specialist classrooms in other subjects and in developing subject resources through the allocation of a budget to each subject co-ordinator. As a result, spending is more closely related to necessary developments and financial planning is now good. This is a very good improvement since the last inspection, when financial planning was judged to be unsatisfactory.
83. Financial control remains strong. The head of centre meets regularly with the local education authority to monitor the use of the centre's income and ensure it is well spent on priorities for development. The head of centre and local education authority seek to achieve best value in challenging whether purchases are needed, consulting staff and pupils, and in obtaining competitive quotations. However, few comparisons are made with pupil referral units outside the authority to ensure that the centre is achieving best value. For example, in the development of provision for information and communication technology, the centre could very usefully compare its spending and provision with other pupil referral units to determine how pupil access to the Internet is managed and how information and communication technology is used elsewhere to raise attainment.
84. The centre continues to use the resources available to it effectively. It now has a full complement of permanent teaching staff, who are subject specialists; it makes good use of its teaching and non-teaching staff, and this ensures that pupils are well taught. Good use is made of the accommodation and of the new learning resources that have been purchased, which also contribute to improved teaching and learning. The centre has used the grants available to it well, for example to ensure that staff receive training in initiatives such as the Key Stage 3 Strategy. Pupils' overall achievement is satisfactory and their personal development is good. Teaching is now good and the curriculum has improved significantly, although weaknesses in assessment remain. Recent improvements in staffing and the move to full-time provision are likely gradually to be reflected in raised standards and greater coherence. The centre has sustained its effectiveness in returning half its pupils to mainstream school. It provides good value for money.

WHAT SHOULD THE UNIT DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

85. The head of centre, together with the local education authority and management committee, should build on the work undertaken following the last inspection to raise standards and develop further the quality of provision as follows:

(1) Improve the rate of attendance, by:

- tackling the high rate of unauthorised absence amongst older pupils and strengthening curriculum liaison between the centre and the Youth Programmes Unit;
- setting attendance targets for individual pupils and issuing rewards that reflect success in meeting these targets.

(Paragraphs 24, 40, 53)

(2) Improve assessment, recording and reporting, by:

- devising a detailed system for recording pupils' attainment and progress in all aspects of English and literacy;
- streamlining and developing the records that are kept centrally so that each pupil has a profile that is up to date and contains a clear overview of all aspects of his/her academic development (within each subject area) and personal progress;
- tightening the requirements set out in the assessment policy, so that all staff know exactly what they are expected to do;
- ensuring that reports to parents provide clear information about what pupils' know, understand and can do in each subject;
- providing a report at the end of the academic year for the parents of all pupils, regardless of when they joined the centre.

(Paragraphs 57-62, 68)

(3) Improve provision for pupils with special educational needs, by:

- diagnosing pupils' literacy difficulties more thoroughly and using this information to inform teaching and support;
- making all targets in individual education plans specific and measurable;
- testing pupils more regularly in relation to their difficulties and recording the outcome so that their progress is clearly evident.

(Paragraph 59)

(4) Develop the leadership and strategic management skills of the head of the centre and others with key management responsibilities, with particular reference to:

- monitoring teaching and learning, teachers' record keeping (in relation to subjects of the curriculum and pupils' behaviour), and the implementation of policies;
- evaluating the centre's overall effectiveness and identifying ways of improving the quality of internal provision.

(Paragraphs 70, 73-74)

- (5) Improve the management of pupils' behaviour by:
- tightening up on the procedural guidance to teachers in the behaviour policy and the bullying policy;
 - ensuring that all staff take firm and consistent action to deal with challenging behaviour and complete records of any incidents.
- (Paragraph 54)

Minor issues for possible inclusion in the action plan:

- (1) To make expectations clearer to parents in relation to homework; to set homework regularly and follow up on its completion, whilst remaining aware of individual circumstances.
(Paragraphs 64-5)
- (2) To formalise induction arrangements for new staff.
(Paragraph 78)
- (3) To ensure that there is a plan for the promotion of pupils' spiritual development, and for increasing their awareness of cultural diversity, in the unit as a whole and within subjects.
(Paragraphs 48, 51)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	23
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	15

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Number	1	7	10	5	0	0	0
Percentage	4	30	43	23	0	0	0

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 one 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	10

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	10

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

Attendance

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
	%		%
Unit data	12.63	Unit data	20.32

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	10
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: Y7 – Y11

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	4.9
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	2

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y7– Y11

Total number of education support staff	2
Total aggregate hours worked per week	57.5

Financial information

Financial year	2001/2002
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	£
Total income	501287
Total expenditure	410526
Expenditure per pupil	-
Balance brought forward from previous year	-
Balance carried forward to next year	90761

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the unit during the last two years	5
Number of teachers appointed to the unit during the last two years	6

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

Summary of parents' and carers' responses

No parents returned the parents' questionnaire and the carers of only one pupil attended the parents' meeting. They were very positive about the centre's work, particularly:

- its effectiveness in increasing pupils' confidence and their ability to concentrate;
- its promotion of positive attitudes and values;
- the way pupils' behaviour is managed;
- the way some pupils' attendance improves through coming to the centre;
- the approachability of the staff.

The only weakness they were able to identify was the lack of a playground. Some uncertainty was expressed on the issue of homework, in terms of the amount expected and how parents could best help their children with work at home.