

INSPECTION REPORT

HEPSCOTT PARK PRU

Hepscott, near Morpeth

LEA area: Northumberland

Unique reference number: 132130

Headteacher: Maxine Hepple

Lead inspector: Alastair Younger

Dates of inspection: 6th - 8th June 2005

Inspection number: 268689

Inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Range of needs supported: Behavioural, emotional, social and educational
School category: Pupil referral unit
Age range of pupils: 11-16
Gender of pupils: Mixed
Number on roll: 21

School address: Hepscott Park
Stannington
Morpeth
Northumberland
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Appropriate authority: The local education authority
Name of responsible officer: Mike Tomkinson

Date of previous inspection: Not previously inspected

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE UNIT

This is the only pupil referral unit in Northumberland. It has places for up to 24 boys and girls in Years 7 to 11. These pupils have either been excluded from previous schools or are at risk of being so because of their behaviour. Nearly all of the pupils are boys. All pupils are white British; there are no refugees, asylum seekers or traveller children. One pupil is in the care of the local education authority. All pupils are at 'school action plus'. No pupils have a statement of special educational need (SEN) but the unit has a contributory role in assessment for SEN. The main aim of the unit is to return pupils as quickly as possible to school. Attainment on entry is usually below average.

Eight places are reserved for permanently excluded pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9. Permanently excluded pupils in Years 10 and 11 are not referred to the unit. There are currently only three pupils in Years 10 and 11, and there are often long periods when there are none.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
23587	Alastair Younger	Lead inspector	Science, art and design, Spanish, music, religious education
9511	Anne Longfield	Lay inspector	
1782	Andrew Lyons	Team inspector	English, citizenship, geography, history, special educational needs.
23390	Mel Blackband	Team inspector	Mathematics, information and communication technology, design and technology, physical education, personal, health and social education

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

This is a good unit. It gives good value for money. Pupils achieve well because teaching is good. Their attitudes and behaviour improve greatly and, as a result, most pupils are returned to school quickly. Learning is spread over a good range of subjects so pupils do not miss out on many of the experiences they would have in school. Pupils are very well cared for and unit staff work closely with parents to help their children. Holding this all together is very high quality leadership and good management.

The unit's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- The head and senior teacher provide a powerful driving force for the unit's development but monitoring and evaluation of the unit's effectiveness are underdeveloped
- There are very high expectations of pupils behaving well and they are given considerable help to do so
- The good curriculum is developing well
- Staff and pupils develop very strong and beneficial relationships
- Parents are kept very well informed about their children's progress
- Teachers do not always explain with sufficient clarity what they want pupils to learn in each lesson.

This is the first time the unit has been inspected. Many improvements are on record since the present head was appointed two years ago. The status of the unit has been significantly raised, staffing has improved and the unit is in a good position to become even more effective.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Pupils' achievement	in relation to individual targets in:	
	subjects of the curriculum	personal and social education
By the time they leave*	Good	Good

Inspectors make judgements in the range: excellent; very good; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; poor; very poor.

* Pupils leave at many different ages and at all times of the year, not just at the end of Year 9 or Year 11

Achievement is good. A careful balance is kept between promoting academic achievement and personal development. Most pupils are admitted following long periods of underachievement in their schools. This is usually because their behaviour has stood in the way of better progress rather than because of any significant degree of learning difficulty. Unit staff are quick to check what pupils already know and where they feel improvements are most needed. These areas are worked on with the result that progress is quickly seen and achievement in English, mathematics, science, information and communication technology and personal health and social education is good. There are very few pupils in Years 10 and 11 but when they attend well they make very similar progress to pupils in Years 7 – 9. The result of this good achievement is that nearly all pupils are returned to school within a year and many in a much shorter time.

Pupils' personal qualities, including their spiritual, moral social and cultural development, quickly show good improvement. Most pupils are at an all-time low when they are admitted. Almost half have been excluded from at least one school and the rest are on the brink of exclusion because of their unacceptable behaviour and attitudes. At the unit they are given a great amount of help to overcome their difficulties. They quickly develop stronger social and moral values and their behaviour and attitudes improve. Many pupils still have moments when their frustration, anxiety and anger overflow into unacceptable behaviour but these are dealt with very well by senior staff, so as to cause minimal disruption to the learning of other pupils. Most pupils attend well but repeated absence by a small number greatly lowers overall attendance in such a small unit. However, once in the unit very little time is wasted between lessons or at the end of break and lunchtimes.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education provided by the unit is good. Teaching and learning are good.

Teachers put their considerable expertise to good use in helping pupils to learn. Staff develop very good relationships with pupils with the result that pupils trust them and staff are then able to encourage them to try their hardest. The very good understanding that builds up between pupils and staff, coupled with a high degree of specialist subject knowledge, enables teachers to set pupils work which usually challenges them without encroaching too much on their, frequently low, self esteem. Teachers do not always make it clear what they expect each pupil to achieve in lessons. This makes it more difficult for them to gauge the effectiveness of their teaching or to provide clear information about exactly what gains pupils are making. Nevertheless, learning is helped by teachers' skilful questioning of pupils to establish what they have remembered and what they have forgotten. The timetable includes all of the subjects of the national curriculum and balances them well with a good programme of personal, health, social and citizenship education, but there are insufficient opportunities for work related learning in Years 10 and 11. Many extra activities are arranged to give pupils good awareness that learning opportunities are all around them and not just in the classroom. There has been a strong drive to improve learning opportunities by getting subject leaders to plan more carefully, taking greater account of the special circumstances of pupils in the unit. Great attention is paid to the care, welfare, health and safety of pupils. No pupil is in doubt that they can approach any member of staff in confidence at any time of personal difficulty. Good relationships with local schools greatly help pupils to return to their schools with minimal disruption to their learning. Unit staff are not yet working with local colleges to open up new opportunities for pupils in Years 10 and 11.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership is very good. Management is good. The local education authority and management group are offering good support. The headteacher provides very good leadership. A strong deputy and the highly effective office manager make a significant contribution to the smooth running of the unit. In just two years, strong leadership has resulted in a transformed, forward looking unit, which has realistic ideas about how it can become even better. Most management procedures are good but procedures to evaluate the unit's effectiveness in order to set clearer and more precise targets for improvement are underdeveloped. The management group and local education authority have ensured that statutory requirements are being well met.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

There was a good turnout for the parents' meeting before the inspection and nearly all expressed positive views of the unit. Nearly all feel that their children have been greatly helped and like the fact that unit staff always keep in touch, with good news as well as bad. Nearly all of the pupils spoken to felt that the unit was helping them to sort out their problems and helping them to get back to school.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

The most important things the unit should do to improve are:

- Strengthen the way that management evaluates the effectiveness of the unit's work in order to set clearer targets for improvement.
- Support teachers by helping them to identify more clearly what they want pupils to learn in each lesson and therefore help them to judge pupils' progress more precisely.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses

Achievement is good. Standards on entry vary from about average to very low. Overall, they are below average.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Most pupils are quickly and successfully returned to school
- There are good reviews of pupils' progress but target setting is underdeveloped
- Underachievement is rapidly reversed and pupils make up for lost time. Achievement in English, mathematics, science and information and communication technology is good.

Commentary

1. The unit's success can best be measured by the fact that it has a very good record of returning pupils to school. Over the last complete year 63 pupils were returned to their schools or found alternative schools. A few pupils have been found places in special schools following the completion of assessment procedures for statements of special educational need, to which the unit has made a valuable contribution. There is currently only one pupil on the roll of the unit who has been there for more than six months; over a half have been on roll for less than three months. Most returns to school are successful and long lasting and there is little call for re-referral.

2. The achievement of pupils is reviewed weekly. Pupils and a senior teacher spend time together discussing and reviewing progress over the previous week. These reviews maintain a good balance between monitoring progress in terms of personal development and in the subjects of the curriculum. This provides pupils with a good opportunity to be involved in evaluating their own progress and motivates them to work hard. These meetings are informed through records of attainment and effort, which are scored by all teachers at the end of each lesson. This is a good initiative but it is weakened by the fact that it does not sufficiently lead to the setting of precise, small, measurable targets for improvement which could then be used by managers to quantify success, for instance by comparing targets met, partially met or not met. This would also open up better opportunities for setting whole unit targets, against which effectiveness and trends could be more accurately measured. At present, this aspect of the unit's work is underdeveloped.

3. When pupils are first admitted many have been significantly underachieving, often for several terms. This is usually because they have either not been attending previous schools sufficiently to make sustained progress or because their behaviour has stood in the way of learning. Very few pupils have significant learning difficulties. Through skilled teaching and management pupils are helped to fulfil their potential. This often results, initially, in good gains in the basic skills of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology. This serves to reinforce their faith in themselves and greatly facilitates achievement in other subjects. In all the main subjects, pupils get off to a good start and achieve well overall. The few, higher attaining pupils are frequently working at a level that is about average for their age. Lower attaining pupils are as much as three years behind. Individual needs are quickly established, work is usually varied to meet these needs and good extra support is given when it is needed. As a result, many pupils make up to a year's gain in half that time whilst in the unit. There is no significant difference in the achievement of pupils in different age groups but the curriculum for pupils in Years 10 and 11 limits pupil achievement in work related learning. Analysis of work suggests that there is no difference in the achievement of boys and girls.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are good. Provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Attendance is satisfactory and punctuality is very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is a very high expectation that pupils will behave well.
- Staff are good at helping pupils to learn to take responsibility for their own behaviour
- There are very effective procedures for improving pupils' attendance

Commentary

4. When they arrive, most pupils have little confidence or self-esteem. After only a short period in the unit, however, pupils are demonstrating how quickly they have developed good relationships with the staff and each other. With improving academic achievements and by achieving success in their personal development pupils' confidence quickly grows. What is considered acceptable or unacceptable behaviour is made very clear to pupils from the outset and staff rigidly stick to these guidelines. Rewards and sanctions are clear and consistently applied. Progress towards individual behavioural targets is reviewed weekly in discussion between pupils and a senior teacher. There have been frequent exclusions in the last year but they are rarely for more than one or two days and always for a good cause. Most are accounted for by a few pupils who, with hindsight, the unit and local education authority recognise should not have been admitted in the first place.

Ethnic background of pupils

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	63 over the course of the year	54	0

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

5. Pupils say that they do not experience bullying or harassment. When poor language or name-calling is reported, staff act quickly, clearly explaining why this is unacceptable. The result of all this is that pupils grow in confidence, become more responsible for their own actions and show a renewed interest in their education. There is a good emphasis on praising good behaviour and rewarding hard work. For example, girls have been taken to the hairdressers and boys to buy fishing tackle as special rewards.

6. A good emphasis is put on promoting pupils' personal development. They are encouraged to take responsibility for their own conduct. In daily 'Focus' lessons, pupils learn about the advantages of assertive, and disadvantages of aggressive, behaviour. They are taught how to get on with friends and family members and how to deal with bullying. Pupils are helped to discuss their behaviour sensibly and to reflect on their feelings. At the end of most lessons, pupils spend time evaluating their own behaviour and their progress towards individual targets. This has a significant effect in helping them to gain a stronger self-knowledge and to practise a higher level of self-control. This prepares pupils well for returning to their mainstream schools. The unit is working well to develop pupils' awareness of their own cultural traditions and heritage through developing the pupils' knowledge and understanding of local history. This has included a recent visit to Beamish Museum. Pupils also learn about other cultures, mainly through studies in art and music and also through their Spanish lessons.

7. A lot of absence is accounted for by a very small number of pupils. Last year, for instance, about a third of all absence was accounted for by just two pupils. Action to promote attendance is very good. Staff work closely with other agencies, especially educational welfare. Parents are

promptly contacted if their children are absent and pupils are awarded certificates and rewards for good attendance. Once in the unit, punctuality is very good, with very little learning time being lost between lessons or at the end of break and lunchtimes.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	19.5	School data	3
National data	N/A	National data	N/A

The table gives the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of education is good. The good curriculum is well taught and pupils are well cared for. Close communication with parents and good relationships with mainstream schools are helping pupils to keep their stay in the unit short.

Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are good. Assessment is satisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Specialist teachers, with very good subject knowledge, teach all of the main subjects.
- Strong relationships between teachers and pupils contribute significantly to pupils' willingness to learn.
- The planning of lessons does not always take sufficient account of what teachers expect pupils to learn in them.
- The marking of books and the questioning of pupils is good but formal assessment is underdeveloped.

Commentary

8. The teaching of most subjects by specialist teachers is of great benefit to pupils. The depth of subject knowledge and understanding is evident in many lessons. It leads to the teacher being able to direct perceptive questioning to individuals and reacting confidently to their responses, for instance when pupils were learning about probability in a Year 8 mathematics lesson or about the local mining industry in history. Imaginative methods are used to make learning interesting, including visits to places of interest and relevance to topics being studied. Teachers are also making increasingly confident and good use of computers to help pupils to learn and present their work well.

9. Most of the pupils have previously experienced considerable difficulty in relating to teachers. The skill and effort that teachers put into overcoming this is a significant factor in helping pupils to learn. Pupils recognise that staff are there to help them to learn and develop better personal skills and they respond well. In a Year 9 English lesson, for instance, the very good relationship between pupils and the teacher helped to relax the pupils enough to read out aloud, confident that their efforts would be recognised and that sympathetic and subtle help would be given to them if they encountered difficulty. This also helps to reduce instances of misbehaviour and the need for teachers to impose sanctions on pupils.

10. Planning for lessons is very variable. It is usually good in English where the guidance of national strategies for raising standards is put to good use. In mathematics and ICT, however, it is weaker. With small classes, teachers quickly build up a good understanding of the ability of each pupil and the ways they react to different situations. This helps teachers to prepare suitable work for individuals. This is further helped by pupils' responses to questions, which are regularly asked at the

beginning of each lesson, to establish what pupils have remembered of previous learning. The result of this is that pupils are set appropriate work; hard enough to challenge them, but not so hard as to discourage them.

11. Teachers do not always make it clear exactly what they expect each pupil to achieve in lessons. This makes it more difficult for them to gauge the effectiveness of their teaching or to provide clear information about exactly what gains pupils are making. Learning objectives are all too often stated in very general terms, or not at all, as in a few ICT and mathematics lessons. This means there is little scope for the teacher to gauge the success of his, or her, teaching in terms of pupils' progress. This contributes to a weakening of formal assessment. Assessment is satisfactory overall, because teachers are taking great care to mark work accurately and to question pupils about what they have learned or forgotten. It is not, however, sufficiently sophisticated to establish exactly how much progress pupils are making over a period of time, whether progress in all subjects or class groups is similar or whether small changes in provision are having any impact.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 17 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
0	2	9	6	0	0	0

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

The curriculum

The good curriculum includes many opportunities for enrichment. Accommodation and resources are satisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good curriculum development has helped to improve pupils' achievement
- There is no alternative curriculum for the few pupils in Years 10 and 11
- The curriculum successfully combines academic work with activities which support pupils' personal development
- Most teachers are specialists in the subjects they teach and this has a positive effect on pupils' progress.

Commentary

12. The curriculum closely reflects that of the schools that pupils have come from and are likely to return to. This helps pupils to keep in touch with all the subjects of the national curriculum. Teachers have generally made good use of national initiatives to raise standards for pupils aged 11 to 14, especially in literacy, but less so in numeracy. As a result, pupils are being prepared well for returning to school. Teachers have created good programmes for each subject, choosing elements of the national curriculum which will give maximum benefit in terms of developing pupils' knowledge and understanding and in motivating them to work hard. The curriculum is constantly under review and continues to develop effectively. A recent upgrade of computer technology has enabled teachers to plan an increasingly good degree of information and communications technology into their lessons.

13. There are only three pupils in Years 10 and 11, and frequently there are none. Placements also tend to be short because none of these pupils are permanently excluded and all have other schools to return to. These pupils tend to follow the same curriculum as those in Years 7, 8 and 9. For most, this is appropriate, reflecting their stage of development and their ability but occasionally there are pupils who could benefit from an alternative curriculum with a more work-based emphasis and better links with further education colleges. In this respect the curriculum for these pupils is slightly weaker than for those in years 7,8 and 9.

14. Pupils are encouraged to visit new places and to experience activities they have not previously encountered. There have been beach barbecues, walks and picnics in the Cheviot Hills and visits to museums. Through the reward system, some pupils, as a result of good behaviour, have been able to visit the Farne Islands, the Newcastle Quayside and the Baltic Art Gallery. Individual pupils have enjoyed experiences such as a meal out in a restaurant and working with a local baker.

15. A good balance between promoting academic knowledge and developing personal, emotional and social skills has been achieved. In art, for instance, pupils have created very striking life-size figures known as 'The Four Moods', which adorn the entrance. The stimulus of this was discussion about how they felt when they first came and this was followed up by teaching pupils the necessary skills to represent these feelings in a physical way. Work in personal, health and social education is sensitively structured to meet the needs of the pupils. 'Focus' lessons each morning help them to develop their understanding of social and moral issues.

16. There is a good match of teachers to the curriculum. Most teachers are specialists in their subjects and bring a high degree of expertise to lessons. This enables them to extend pupils' knowledge and understanding through the curriculum and to use their expertise to give individual tuition to pupils where necessary. The competent teaching assistants give good support and work effectively with the teachers.

17. The accommodation is satisfactory although there are some shortcomings. Provision for art is cramped and scope for work in design technology is inhibited by the smallness of the workshop. This means only basic hand tools can be used in relatively simple activities. There is inadequate provision to teach home economics satisfactorily. The unit has no accommodation for physical education. The playground is small and unsuited to games and staff and pupils must travel to gain access to even basic facilities. Resources throughout the unit are generally satisfactory but there is a very good range of resources to support the teaching of information and communication technology.

Care, guidance and support

Arrangements for ensuring pupils' care, welfare, health and safety are very good. The unit provides pupils with very good personal and academic advice and involves them well in its work.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is very good provision for pupils' health, welfare and safety.
- There are very good relationships between pupils and staff
- Pupils are helped to settle quickly into the routines of the unit

Commentary

18. The unit provides a healthy and safe learning environment. Fire drills are carried out to ensure safe and efficient evacuation of the building. Very good child protection procedures are in place. The head teacher is the designated person and ensures that all staff know and implement the procedures. Trips away from the school are fully assessed for potential risk. Electrical appliances have been checked and fire risk has been assessed.

19. Pupils are welcoming to visitors and there is a friendly atmosphere in the unit. Pupils and parents report that there is very little bullying and that the staff deal with any issues quickly and effectively. Pupils believe that teachers provide good help and expect them to work hard. They are very happy to approach and discuss any concerns with staff. The excellent relationships between staff and pupils result in very open discussions, where pupils feel free to talk about their problems, knowing that staff will do their utmost to help them to resolve them. Pupils are given very good support to help them improve their work and to get back to school. Additional support is frequently

accessed, including help to improve pupils' attendance. There is also ready access to educational psychologists and social workers.

20. There is good help and guidance to help pupils to settle quickly into the routines of the unit. High expectations of good behaviour are quickly impressed on pupils and they are left in no doubt that attending the unit is only a short term measure to help them return successfully to school. Pupils are quickly assessed on entry to the unit so that they can be placed in a class that best meets their academic and social needs. All pupils have access to statutory careers guidance and this is well backed up by teachers from the unit. Pupils are regularly consulted about their views and the unit has recently introduced a suggestions box so that pupils can express their views anonymously.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The unit has very good links with parents. Links with the community and other schools are good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school works extremely well with parents and encourages them to be fully involved in their children's learning.
- The quality of information provided to parents is very good and ensures they are well informed about their children's behaviour and progress.
- There are few links with local colleges and employers.

Commentary

21. A very good partnership with parents and carers has been created. Parents are very supportive of the unit and appreciate the quality of education provided. Parents expressed their full support for the unit through their responses to the questionnaire and at the very well attended parents meeting prior to the inspection. They feel that the unit is particularly good at keeping them well informed about their children's progress. What they like most is that good news is reported as eagerly as bad news. For some, this is a revelation. Staff listen carefully to parent's concerns and deal very promptly and effectively with them. This greatly reassures parents and contributes well to the very good relationships. Regular review meetings inform parents about their child's progress at the unit. These meetings are usually attended by a range of professionals involved in the pupils' education and well-being. Unit staff have a heightened awareness of the problems that many parents face and recognise that it is pointless helping the pupils without helping their parents as well. To this end, considerable support and advice is extended to parents.

22. Although the unit is in a somewhat isolated position staff have formed very good relations with the local residents, who were initially very reluctant to have the unit placed on their doorsteps. Since opening, however, many local residents have been impressed with the work of the unit. They have been encouraged to attend informative open evenings and although these have been sparsely attended, those who do come leave impressed and reassured. Having a local resident on the management group has also helped relationships.

23. There are rapidly improving links with mainstream schools. Information about pupils' past achievements is frequently slow to arrive and this does not help the unit to settle pupils quickly but the situation is improving, largely due to the efforts of unit staff. The effectiveness of links, however is seen in the fact that the unit is successful in returning pupils to school. This could not be achieved without the extensive work carried out by the unit to foster good working relationships with many of the local schools. A few remain reluctant to enter into a two-way relationship but the number is reducing.

24. Links with local colleges and employers are underdeveloped. The unit does not involve itself sufficiently in providing work experience placements or college courses for older pupils because they are all on the roll of other schools and arrangements are made through these. This system is

not failsafe however and it is possible for a very few pupils to miss out on valuable experiences. A few pupils, however, have been given a small amount of work experience in the adjoining horticultural training centre, which shares a good relationship with the unit.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

There is very good leadership and good management. The management group offers good support and ensures that statutory requirements are met.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The headteacher works very effectively in leading the pupils and staff to raise standards and improve strategies for teaching and learning. Key staff lead the unit very well and set out a clear framework and expectations for both learning and behaviour.
- Day to day management of the unit is good. Subject leadership and the management of the curriculum are good but the unit has not developed clear strategies for evaluating its effectiveness.
- The Management Group gives good guidance and acts as an effective critical friend.

Commentary

25. Since her appointment, two years ago, the headteacher has worked tirelessly to set the unit on an even keel to further support pupils' learning and their subsequent reintroduction to their secondary school. There is a very clear view of what has to be done. The first phase of planning and development by the senior team has been very effectively completed and much has been achieved.

26. Links with the local schools have improved dramatically and the LEA recognises the improvements in the provision. Staff are committed to the unit and staffing has been strengthened by permanent appointments. Subject leaders are developing good programmes of study and are monitoring standards effectively. This is particularly so in English, mathematics, science and ICT, where it is most important to know where pupils are up to. Teachers quickly establish where pupils are so that they can start to teach them effectively. This is because the information is often not readily available from the feeder schools.

27. Day to day management is good. Staff work together as a team and recognise how the work of the unit is improving and the effectiveness of their individual contribution. Staff meetings follow carefully considered agendas, which results in responsibilities being shared well. Teaching and learning is monitored well. This guides further planning effectively and forms part of the professional development of staff. All staff benefit from regular training. At present, the use of data to help raise pupils' achievements and fine-tune improvements is underdeveloped.

28. The management group is developing its role well to become more involved in reviewing the work of the unit. It currently meets termly and acts on a progress report from the headteacher, which focuses particularly on attendance and achievement. The LEA lead officer contributes issues from the authority which are informing policy. Many representatives from other agencies are being added to this group and this widens the representation, giving the management committee a good breadth of experience and influence. There is an elected member of the local authority on the group who acts as its chairman, and this enables the voice of the unit to be heard at all levels and to give independent representation.

29. As is common in units such as this, only a very small part of the total budget is managed by the headteacher. Last year this amounted to about £7,500 for books, materials and staff development. Money has been particularly well spent on improving resources for learning, ICT being a good example. Money is very well managed, with careful recording of income and expenditure. There is no capacity to carry over unspent funding from one year to the next.

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4

ENGLISH

Provision for English is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils achieve well because teaching is good.
- Teachers quickly establish what pupils already know and understand then plan work well, often incorporating the use of computers.
- Leadership and management are good
- Pupils are not sufficiently encouraged to read more when out of lessons.

Commentary

30. Lessons are well planned to meet the individual needs of pupils and good teaching strategies are used to encourage reluctant learners. This enables pupils to improve basic skills in reading and writing. There are good opportunities for the lowest attaining pupils, who are often very behind in their work when they are first admitted. They frequently find both reading and writing of even simple words difficult but get good quality help on a one-to-one basis. This enables these pupils to make very good initial progress so that they can quickly join their regular class.

31. Speaking and listening skills are promoted well in lessons, often through skilful questioning by the teacher, but there are few other opportunities to develop discussion skills in more formal situations because class groups are very small, often comprising only two pupils. Teachers have high expectations both of work and behaviour and good relationships and firm discipline lead to good learning in lessons. For example, in one lesson, pupils gained a clear understanding of how advertising worked and how to use persuasive language effectively. All pupils are encouraged to read out loud in lessons. This improves language acquisition effectively and also improves pupils' confidence. Pupils achieve well in terms of improving their spelling because the teaching of spelling strategies is regular and good. Achievement in writing is supported effectively by methods that allow pupils to develop a good range of words that they can include in their writing.

32. The subject is well organised. The curriculum is well planned. It is well supported with a suitable range of resources that enable pupils who have not achieved well in the past, to learn more successfully. Pupils are successfully encouraged to use computers to enhance the presentation of their work and are taught how to use computer tools such as 'spellcheck' to help them produce accurate work. a few magazines and newspapers for pupils to read during informal moments The unit provides such as break and lunchtime but insufficient attention is paid to encourage other reading at these times, for instance by providing a stimulating and relevant range of books.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

33. Literacy is well promoted throughout the unit. In most subjects pupils are encouraged to listen carefully, express opinions clearly, read and record. Teachers skilfully encourage pupils to read out loud and then use the content to further consolidate the understanding through skilful question and answer sessions.

MATHEMATICS

Provision for mathematics is **good**

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils make good progress because activities are well matched to their ability and attainment
- The pupils' learning is well managed by a specialist teacher
- Leadership and management of the subject are good
- Lesson planning is ineffective

Commentary

34. Pupils' mathematical ability is quickly checked on admission. Activities are then adapted well to their ability level. Teachers question pupils frequently during lessons to ensure that they have remembered and understood their work. Each pupil receives a high level of personal tuition and support. The work of higher ability pupils in Year 9 approaches national expectations for their age and effectively raises their chances of succeeding in the subject when they return to mainstream school.

35. Analysis of pupils' books and folders shows they achieve well and make good progress in a short time in the unit. Teaching is good. The specialist teacher has a good knowledge of the subject and extends the pupils understanding through well-chosen questions. Lessons proceed at a good pace and the teacher manages the pupils well, establishing very good relationships. The pupils respond by working hard. They enjoy mathematics work because they feel confident that the teacher will help them to achieve well. The lessons are however, scantily planned. Learning objectives and activities are not clearly stated and the planning does not help the teacher to plan sequences of work or to ensure that activities build with maximum effectiveness on one another. There are insufficient opportunities for small group work where pupils can collaborate and share ideas and solutions to problems.

36. Pupils have satisfactory targets for mathematics but day-to-day assessment methods, while satisfactory, are not rigorous. Efficient marking and the addition of helpful comments do not accompany the lesson-by-lesson assessment of pupils' progress. This is an opportunity lost to reinforce the helpful comments the teacher makes to pupils in lessons.

37. Leadership and management of the subject are good. The teacher has created a good development plan and has provided effective assessment when pupils enter the unit. The teacher has a clear idea of where improvements need to be made. The curriculum is satisfactory but does not sufficiently reflect and incorporate national initiatives to raise standards in mathematics.

Mathematics across the curriculum

38. Opportunities for pupils to increase their mathematical knowledge in other subjects are satisfactory. In design technology, for instance, pupils are expected to measure accurately and in art the pupils measure and complete scale drawings. Some use of scale drawing and time measurement, in time lines, is practised in humanities as pupils complete a project on castles.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **good**

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils achieve well, the strong focus on practical work interests and motivates pupils
- Leadership and management are very good

Commentary

39. Pupils achieve well. Their work is neat, well organised and covers a wide range of topics from all of the most important areas of the science curriculum. It is good, in a unit such as this, to see so much attention being paid to making science learning interesting. Pupils do not just learn facts; they find things out for themselves through conducting experiments. When testing different materials to see if magnets attract them or if electricity can pass through them, pupils have been asked to make predictions before testing. The recording of work is methodical and pupils are given good opportunities to develop skills in drawing diagrams and constructing tables to illustrate their work and present results. All work is carefully marked, occasionally a little intrusively, but always with an encouraging tone. Marking leaves pupils in no doubt as to what they have got right or wrong and how they can improve their work.

40. Teaching is good. Lessons usually start with a good question and answer session to establish what pupils have remembered from earlier lessons or to find out what new pupils already know. Good attention is paid to making learning relevant, for instance, when pupils were learning about chemical reactions the example of making concrete was used to illustrate an irreversible reaction and the reconstitution of dried soup as a reversible reaction. Where possible, pupils are encouraged to work in pairs; this makes a good contribution to their personal development. In the few lessons where teaching was less than good, this was mainly because of lack of adaptation of published texts to meet individual needs. This occasionally leads to frustration as pupils struggle to elicit the information they need to answer questions. When this happens, there is stagnation in the lesson and pupils become increasingly reluctant to cooperate.

41. The subject leader has produced an excellent handbook for the teaching of science. The booklet contains valuable information about the curriculum, teaching and organisation of the subject. It is insightful, helpful and comprehensive, including detailed information about how the subject can also contribute to pupils' learning in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology. Good steps have very recently been taken to improve the assessment of pupils' progress. These include testing before topics are started and again afterwards, to establish what new has been learned. The checking of teaching, by two different teachers is not closely monitored but the subject leader is well placed to ensure that the curriculum is taught as he plans all the lessons. Good use is made of the limited facilities.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Provision for information and communications technology (ICT) is **good**

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Activities are adapted successfully for pupils of differing ability and this has a positive effect on their achievement
- Opportunities to learn have been significantly increased by new computer facilities
- Leadership and management are good.

Commentary

42. Pupils make good progress because they are well taught by a well-qualified specialist teacher, ably supported by good teaching assistants. Pupils are confident of success and they are very willing to discuss difficulties and achievements with staff. Pupils in Year 7 confidently apply basic techniques in word processing and Internet use. In Years 8 and 9, pupils create and adapt presentations and develop a growing understanding of spreadsheets and desktop publishing. In a good Year 9 lesson, pupils edited their presentation about 'Myself' confidently using word processing skills and learning how to enhance the presentation through background change and by introducing photographs and other graphics from the internet. The teacher's subject expertise is clearly evident and this combines with high expectations, thorough planning and accurate assessment to ensure that pupils achieve well. Many of the higher attaining pupils are working to

the average standard seen in mainstream schools. Pupils' self- assessment is a strong feature of lessons; combined with the teacher's comments, it give pupils valuable information about how well they are doing.

43. The curriculum has been significantly enhanced through extensive new equipment. Pupils are able to work at individual workstations on high specification computers linked to the Internet. Appropriate safeguards are in place to prevent unauthorised or improper Internet use. The new networked equipment enables pupils to undertake activities on animated presentations, design work and word processing packages as well as learning how to access and process complex data.

44. Leadership and management are good. The subject leader has created a good development plan and has worked closely with local authority advisers to update the ICT curriculum. Plans are currently being developed to extend the use of ICT through the curriculum

Information and communications technology across the curriculum

45. Pupils have good opportunities to use ICT in many lessons. In science the pupils have used data handling programmes and graphics packages. In humanities the pupils have used the internet to research their local area and for a project on castles. Good use is made of digital photography to illustrate the pupils' word-processed work in humanities.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION

The provision for personal, health and social education is **good**

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The curriculum has been well adapted to the learning needs of the pupils
- The subject is well taught by a subject specialist and this has a positive effect on pupils' achievement
- There is good leadership and management

Commentary

46. Pupils achieve well because of skilled teaching and because the curriculum has been well adapted to meet pupils' needs. Pupils learn about sex and relationships and drugs and alcohol. Their understanding and knowledge is effectively assessed and the teacher uses this information well to plan future lessons. Activities are structured to ensure pupils respond appropriately to information which they are given. For example, in a Year 9 lesson the pupils were told about common misconceptions about HIV and AIDS. The pupils learned a great deal about the disease and were also encouraged at every opportunity to give their opinions and to reflect on the consequences of potential actions. Pupils' work in careers education has introduced them to the world of work and to an examination of their own potential and employability. The pupils in Year 9 are able to discuss careers options with Connexions advisers.

47. The subject is well taught. The specialist teacher uses her knowledge very well to plan interesting activities and to give pupils important information about drugs and sexual matters in a clear and uncomplicated way. Where possible she involves professionals such as the nurse or the local drugs awareness team. Good links have been established with social services, the teenage pregnancy team and police liaison officers. The teacher maintains a brisk pace in lessons and uses questions effectively to explore the pupils' understanding and to encourage them to formulate opinions about the real life issues under discussion. Pupils feel confident to express opinions and they respond well to the teacher's high expectations of their mature behaviour and sensible discussion. The pupils maintain a high level of concentration and motivation in lessons and they consequently achieve well. The teacher ensures that pupils evaluate their own work and encourages pupils to give positive and helpful comments about the contribution of other pupils.

48. Leadership and management of the subject are good. The subject leader has successfully involved a range of outside professionals to give depth to the curriculum and she has adapted the broad curriculum to ensure the relevance of her teaching. The curriculum has been successfully linked to 'Focus' lessons where pupils consider the effects of their behaviour in the light of their growing knowledge and understanding.

OTHER SUBJECTS OF THE CURRICULUM

Insufficient lessons were seen to judge overall provision in other subjects but wherever possible, pupils' past work was sampled and teachers were talked to about their approach to teaching each subject.

Art and design

49. Pupils produce a wide variety of very good work of a high standard. To achieve this, pupils work hard in lessons and put considerable thought into developing their ideas and skills. Teaching, by a non-specialist, has been greatly strengthened through a good programme of training and by valuable support from the local education officer. Pupils love the subject and their enthusiasm and commitment is immediately evident in their work. An excellent sculpture project has brought together many important learning opportunities. In producing life-size models of themselves, pupils contemplated how they felt about themselves when they first arrived at their unit. In their early studies they looked for words that described their feelings, such as despair and despondency. From this point, words such as pride and confidence feature ever more frequently in their written descriptions of their work and the development of their emotional literacy is clear to see. In the same study, pupils drew diagrams to scale, calculating circumferences of heads, torsos and limbs and thus contributing to their numeracy skills. The finished objects showed considerable skill in sculpting, using wire mesh armatures, the moulding of 'Modrock' and finishing with resin and paint. Another successful project was the design of large scale carnival floats with a South American theme which gave pupils insights into art forms in other cultures. Pupils are using a very good range of materials, including chalk, pastel, paint and charcoal to create landscapes, portraits and studies from life. The lessons observed were very well taught, the teacher relating exceptionally well to the pupils. Very good resources were used to encourage pupils and to stimulate ideas. When using pastels, pupils were asked to get the feel of the medium before trying to draw pictures and visual aids, such as pictures by L.S. Lowry, were very well used to demonstrate mood.

Design and technology

50. The curriculum incorporates valuable elements of the national curriculum and pupils have produced good examples of toys with moving parts using wood and variable cams. They have also made a bird table for the unit gardens. The pupils follow the design process appropriately and make sketches and scale drawings of their projects. Photographic evidence and well-finished articles demonstrate that the pupils make good progress and work with concentration. The accommodation for teaching about resistant materials is very small and this means there is no room for machinery which would enable pupils to complete more complex work. There is, however, a suitable range of hand tools. There is no appropriate accommodation in which to teach home economics although very small groups of pupils are allowed to cook in the kitchen, under supervision, as part of the Friday activities session.

Humanities (History and Geography)

51. Good, well-organised and structured teaching enables pupils to achieve well. The standard of pupils' work is broadly similar with work in mainstream schools. Good displays celebrate pupils' work. They use reference materials collected on visits and materials from the Internet very effectively. Pupils relate to the current project on coal mining because it deals with their home area and they can talk to local people about the way things were in their youth. In a lesson on 'Working Down the Pit,' pupils explored the feelings and emotions of working in the pitch black. They looked at the children's job of opening the trap doors, what the reasons for the job were and what it was like doing it. They considered what happened when they ate their food whether some of the rats

were seen as possible pets. Pupils are encouraged to read out loud, using imagination for context and then sharing their thoughts and ideas both in speech and in writing. This makes a good contribution to developing their literacy skills. Teaching is undertaken with good humour and enthusiasm that rubs off on the children.

Music

52. Teachers from the Northumberland County Service, who are experienced and very good musicians, undertake the teaching of music. Pupils are currently learning how to play electronic keyboards. One successful lesson started with pupils sounding out a rhythm that their teacher gave them, and then constructing their own that the rest of the class followed. Pupils compose and perform music through devising appropriate themes and accompaniment, these are supported by good use of the percussion facilities on the keyboard, to construct performance pieces such as 'Lost in space'. Pupils listen carefully to a recording of their own performance and are starting to make comments as to the quality of what has been composed. They can, with help, make suggestions as to how it might be improved. Pupils listen to each other's work sensitively and offer positive advice. Relationships between teachers and pupils are good, contributing well to the success of lessons.

Citizenship

53. The citizenship programme is good. The schemes of work are organised in a series of units so that pupils who spend longer at the unit move through a series of related topics. Currently pupils are looking at the media, its role and significance locally, nationally and internationally. The next unit is on crime. Pupils' work suggests that good learning takes place because of well prepared and organised teaching.

Spanish

54. Many pupils have previously achieved very little success in learning French, the usual modern foreign language taught in their schools. The unit counters this, and helps to overcome pupils' resistance, by offering them the chance to start afresh with learning Spanish. No lessons could be observed but all pupils get one lesson a week, where the work they have produced over the last term suggests they are doing well. They have learned how to introduce themselves, greet other people and to ask for things, all very useful should they choose to go on holiday to Spain

PE

55. There are no on-site facilities for teaching the subject so pupils travel to a local hall. The curriculum has been appropriately adapted to ensure that all pupils undertake a relevant physical activity each week. Activities include football, netball and basketball and on occasions badminton. The subject leader has completed substantial training to improve his own knowledge and skills and he has ensured that there are sufficient, good quality resources, such as balls and racquets. Because of the very limited accommodation, pupils do not have outside games lessons although almost every pupil takes part in the daily football game in the unit's small playground.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

<i>Inspection judgement</i>	<i>Grade</i>
The overall effectiveness of the school	3
How inclusive the school is	3
How the school's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection	N/A
Value for money provided by the school	3
Overall standards achieved	3
Pupils' achievement	3
Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities	3
Attendance	4
Attitudes	3
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	3
Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The quality of education provided by the school	3
The quality of teaching	3
How well pupils learn	3
The quality of assessment	4
How well the curriculum meets pupils needs	3
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities	3
Accommodation and resources	4
Pupils' care, welfare, health and safety	2
Support, advice and guidance for pupils	2
How well the school seeks and acts on pupils' views	3
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents	2
The quality of the school's links with the community	3
The school's links with other schools and colleges	3
The leadership and management of the school	3
The governance of the school	3
The leadership of the headteacher	2
The leadership of other key staff	2
The effectiveness of management	3

Inspectors make judgements on a scale: excellent (grade 1); very good (2); good (3); satisfactory (4); unsatisfactory (5); poor (6); very poor (7).