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Inspection report

The Forest Education Centre

Unique Reference Number 115847
LEA Hampshire

Inspection number 273425
Inspection dates 12 and 13 January 2005
Reporting inspector Mrs G Fox HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996 and was deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act.

Type of School	Special	School address	Cabot Drive
School category	Pupil Referral Unit		Dibden
			Southampton
Age range of pupils	5 to 16 years		Hampshire
			SO45 5UG
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	023 8042 3827
Number on roll	47	Fax number	023 8087 9468
Appropriate authority	Hampshire LEA	Chair of management committee	Mr C Diaper
Date of previous inspection	March 2003	Head of Centre	Mrs E Ritchie-Fallon

Age group	Published	Reference no.
5 to 16 years	21 February 2005	273425

Introduction

When the Forest Education Centre was inspected in March 2003, it was judged to require special measures because it was failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education. Her Majesty's Inspectors of schools (HMI) subsequently visited the centre on three occasions to monitor its progress, and reinspected the centre in January 2005.

Description of the Centre

There are two different sites. The Forest Education Centre, which is the secondary site, is situated in Dibden on the south side of Southampton Water. It was opened in May 2002 and caters for all pupils aged 11 to 16 receiving education other than at school. It serves a wide geographical area in south-west Hampshire which has nine secondary and 59 primary schools. The Clifford Centre, which is located seven miles away in Totton, is for the primary aged pupils and offers a behavioural support service, providing intervention programmes for assessment, behaviour change and reintegration. The service also provides home tuition for a small number of pupils. Pupils aged 5 to 11 can be taught, part-time, at the Clifford Centre, and in their mainstream school for the remainder of the time. This centre also supports transition from Year 6 to Year 7 and pupils in Year 7. Pupils aged 11 to 16 are taught at The Forest Education Centre; of these some are part-time at the centre and part-time at a mainstream school while the remainder are full-time at the centre. Almost all pupils are of white heritage. A small minority of pupils are from Traveller backgrounds. All pupils have emotional and/or behavioural difficulties and six have Statements of Special Education Need. There are 47 pupils on the roll at the secondary stage and 45 pupils on the roll of their local mainstream schools who are supported by the Clifford Centre. These numbers vary from week to week as new referrals are included or pupils no longer require this support.

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Overall effectiveness of the centre

In accordance with section 14 of the School Inspections Act 1996, I am of the opinion that the centre no longer requires special measures, since it is now providing an acceptable standard of education for its pupils.

The Forest Education Centre had an unsettled start in 2002 following the amalgamation of existing pupil referral units. It became subject to special measures in March 2003. The concerns related largely to the provision for pupils at the secondary site. Provision at the Clifford Centre for pupils at the primary stage was judged to be effective and has been consistently good throughout the period of special measures. This report therefore relates mainly to the provision at the secondary site of the Forest Education Centre. The leadership and management of the centre have improved significantly, largely as a result of the hard work of the head of centre, appointed December 2003, who is committed to securing improvements in all aspects of the centre's work. Standards are below national averages, largely as a result of the gaps in the pupils' learning due to patchy and disrupted educational experience. However, standards are rising as a consequence of teaching which is mostly good and the pupils are making good progress over time in many of the subjects taught at the centre. The pupils' attitudes and behaviour have improved. They respond well to the high levels of individual attention and support. The curriculum is developing well and there is an improving range of opportunities for the pupils. The centre has good links with most of the schools in the area and has developed good practice in supporting vulnerable pupils in mainstream schools and effecting reintegration. The centre aims to return pupils to their local mainstream schools and is becoming more successful in doing so, especially at Key Stage 3, although the arrangements made by a minority of the mainstream schools to accommodate some of these returning pupils are not robust enough. The centre has supported a number of successful college placements. The Clifford Centre is very effective in maintaining pupils in their local mainstream schools.

Improvement since the last inspection

The inspection of March 2003 required the centre to address key issues concerned with the leadership and management, achievement, teaching and learning, and attendance. There has been good progress in relation to leadership and management and the quality of teaching and learning, and satisfactory progress elsewhere.

Capacity to improve

The centre is well placed to improve. The head of centre has set a strong focus on improving the quality of teaching, and the attendance and achievement of the pupils. She has been well supported by advisers from the local education authority (LEA), who have been particularly effective in supporting the improvements in the quality of teaching. The head of centre provides very good leadership and management but she carries a heavy workload as the middle management of the centre is at an early stage of development. There are suitable plans to strengthen this area. There are effective procedures for

monitoring the centre's progress and for supporting the pupils' individual education plans. The co-ordinators for mathematics and science work effectively to support the teaching of these subjects and to promote and record the progress of the pupils. The post of English co-ordinator is vacant but there are suitable plans to make an appointment in the near future. The co-ordination of information and communication technology (ICT) is not well established, despite being identified as a weakness in 2003. A new co-ordinator for personal, social and health (PSHE) has appropriate plans for improving the teaching of this subject. The Clifford Centre continues to run efficiently and effectively; staff work well as a team and are identifying the most effective ways of supporting individual pupils. There is good partnership work with other local mainstream schools to support the inclusion of pupils with behavioural difficulties.

What the centre should do to improve further

The centre's development plan recognises the areas where improvement is needed. However the key priorities are to:

- strengthen middle management so that the centre manager has good operational support;
- improve the provision for ICT and extend opportunities for all the pupils to participate in a wider range of vocational and extracurricular activities;
- continue to improve the attendance of pupils at Key Stages 3 and 4, with more effective multi-agency support;
- widen the range of accreditation opportunities and enable all the pupils to achieve well.

Achievement and standards

There are significant gaps in the pupils' learning, as a result of patchy and disrupted educational experience, and standards are generally low. However, standards are rising and the pupils are making good progress over time in the subjects taught at the centre. Overall, they make the greatest progress when they undertake oral or practical work. Their achievements in mathematics, science, and design and technology are good. Challenging targets are set in most subjects and there are high expectations. The pupils are producing more written work, both by hand and by using the computer, although many are reluctant writers.

Most pupils make at least satisfactory progress and in some subjects they make good progress. Progress was good in half of the lessons. There is improved provision and more effective strategies for developing the literacy skills of the lowest attaining pupils. However, low levels of literacy are still limiting the pace of learning for a significant number of the pupils.

More pupils were entered for the 2004 national examinations and end-of-key-stage tests than in 2003. In science, four pupils achieved grade G at GCSE, and four gained passes at entry level. In mathematics, one pupil achieved grade F but in English no pupils took the examination. There were nine pupils in the Year 9 class but not all pupils were present for the Key Stage 3 tests. In science, one pupil achieved Level 5 (the expected standard for this age-group), two Level 4 and two Level 3. In mathematics, two pupils achieved Level 5, two Level 4 and one Level 3. In English, three pupils achieved Level 4. The recognition of pupils' achievements through success in external examinations has been hampered by issues of absence, the pupils' anxieties about testing and too narrow a range of accreditation opportunities. The Key Stage 3 results and teacher assessments have been used to set appropriate targets for Key Stage 4 and the centre intends to support as many pupils as possible in gaining suitable accreditation.

Personal development

Overall the attitudes and behaviour of the pupils are satisfactory. In half of the lessons the pupils' behaviour was good; in these lessons they were keen to participate and to co-operate with their teachers and with each other. However in a few lessons, there were a minority of pupils whose poor behaviour disrupted the learning of other pupils. The centre has improved its systems for making more flexible arrangements for pupils who are experiencing particular difficulties.

The behaviour of pupils around the centre was sometimes lively but generally good-humoured. The head of centre sets high standards for discipline; for example, at lunchtime three pupils left the site without permission but they were managed well on their return by the head of centre, who ensured that they served detentions at the end of the school day. As a result of this approach the pupils are clear about what is acceptable behaviour. Some staff are better at holding the line on discipline than are others; consistency in approach is developing but is not yet fully established, for example some allow pupils to wear caps in lessons and others do not. Staff who manage behaviour well give clear messages to the pupils about their expectations. They continue to secure good behaviour through friendly and respectful relationships and engaging activities.

The lunchtimes are reasonably pleasant social occasions although the pupils tend to rush their food in order to go outside. In the lunch break a range of suitable activities and games is provided, which most pupils enjoy and join in well. A number of the pupils continue to smoke cigarettes at break times, at lunchtimes and at the end of the school day behind one of the classroom blocks; the health and safety issues related to this behaviour are being addressed through prominently displayed posters around the centre, through some lessons and as part of the curriculum for PSHE. The high level of staffing at break and lunchtimes promotes orderly behaviour.

The commitment of the staff to supporting the personal development of the pupils is a strength at both centres. A number of the pupils face complex difficulties in their lives. Any troubling issues affecting their education are swiftly identified and very good efforts are

made to help the pupils and encourage them to resolve any problems. There are good links with parents and carers and with the LEA's educational psychology and welfare services.

Attendance is steadily improving but remains very low at just over 70 per cent. A number of appropriate initiatives encourage parents and the pupils to improve attendance. As a result, more than two thirds of the pupils have raised their personal rate of attendance and more than a quarter have attendance rates of 90 per cent and above. Some prolonged and extensive absenteeism requires a more robust multi-agency response. Exclusion rates have fallen significantly compared to the same period last year.

Provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. A range of events is organised to broaden and develop the pupils grasp of their own culture and other heritages. Social development and awareness of the arts are promoted effectively through a variety of experiences within lessons and through additional activities; for example, a trip to an outward bound course included team-building exercises. The pupils' cultural awareness has been supported through music sessions, through celebrating their artistic skills at a local centre and visiting an activity centre. In some lessons, teachers use opportunities well to promote pupils' understanding of moral and spiritual issues. The tutorial programme provides well for the pupils to reflect on their own roles in society and to consider the experiences of others. They are encouraged to become independent thinkers and to take personal responsibility for their actions. In the lessons, the concluding plenary sessions sometimes include very effective opportunities for personal reflection.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching is good and the overall profile of teaching is much improved when compared with 2003. In all but one of the 14 lessons, the teaching was at least satisfactory and it was good or very good in nine lessons. Most of the teachers engage the pupils well through the use of interactive tasks and effective resources. Their lesson planning is sound and their preparation is thorough; they have also improved the beginnings and endings of the lessons and most make learning objectives clear. Many of the lesson plans are sound and show that most teachers are clear about learning objectives. One good example in English made reference to the pupils' learning in the previous lesson and another was tailored well to the individual needs of the pupils. Most teachers made effective reference to the learning objectives, started lessons promptly using interesting starter activities and emphasised key vocabulary, checking the pupils' understanding well through questioning. The closing plenary sessions in several lessons were too brief and were not used well enough to review learning. Overall, there has been an improvement in the amount of written work produced in the lessons and pupils are more willing to settle to written tasks; good examples of this were observed in science, English and mathematics. The teaching of ICT is variable; ICT is not used well enough to support teaching and learning.

The teaching assistants make a valuable contribution to the pupils' learning. They work effectively in supporting the teachers and the pupils, especially when pupils return to mainstream school and college placements. The assistant who gives additional help to

pupils who have literacy difficulties has facilitated improvements in reading and spelling for a significant number of the pupils.

The curriculum has improved; there is a wider range of subjects taught, supported by suitable schemes of work and a sound work-related curriculum. However, the schemes of work for PSHE are not established well enough. The time allocated to the curriculum has increased appropriately to meet requirements. The use of ICT to enhance learning across the curriculum is unsatisfactory. The use of assessment data and the tracking of pupils' progress have improved.

The accommodation is barely satisfactory; there is insufficient space for physical education and no central meeting space. However, the best use is made of the premises and there is reasonable use of the local amenities. The premises are underused after 2.30 pm each afternoon when the pupils leave for home.

There is effective liaison with the parents and carers; this has helped in generating a positive ethos in the centre. The parents are contacted frequently to hear of the success of their children and to be made aware of any concerns.

The centre has good links with most of the schools in the area and has developed good practice in returning pupils to mainstream. The links with other local schools continue to develop well at both centres. More pupils are remaining at the centres for shorter periods of time and are transferring back to mainstream schools or managing part-time placements. Some pupils cope successfully with full-time college placements, supported by a teacher from the centre; this is an encouraging development. There are exciting plans to join with a local special school to bid for specialist status.

The Clifford Centre runs efficiently and effectively; staff work well as a team and identify how best to support individual pupils. There is good partnership work with other local mainstream schools to aid the inclusion of pupils with behavioural difficulties. Staff at the Clifford Centre give very good support to pupils at risk of exclusion at the primary stage and those making the transition to Year 7.

Leadership and management

The head of the centre provides very good leadership and management and clear educational direction. Under her leadership, the staff work hard together cohesively. The centre runs smoothly, policies and procedures are being developed systematically and routines are well established. The head of centre commands the respect of the staff and the pupils. She fosters the development of the staff team and has suitably high expectations of them. Her management skills are good and have improved significantly over the last year. Systems to support improvement are monitored and evaluated effectively. The centre manager's workload is excessive, especially at an operational level. This is partly because the middle management team is not well established. The roles and responsibilities of staff have been reviewed to some extent but further work needs to be done. There are suitable plans to strengthen the role of middle managers as their present

roles are underdeveloped. The education centre manager has updated the action plan in line with developments since the centre became subject to special measures. The plan provides a very good steer for the further improvement of the quality of education at the centre. The subject co-ordination of mathematics and science is good. The co-ordination of English and ICT is unsatisfactory.

Both centres have received a range of good support from the LEA's services. The assigned inspector has played an important part in securing and improving provision at the centre. She has worked very effectively to develop the education centre manager's role in steering improvements in teaching and learning and to revise the action plan. The inspector has also helped staff to improve their lesson planning and teaching. The LEA's educational psychology service is continuing to give good support to teachers in understanding and managing the learning and the emotional needs of the pupils. The LEA's inspectors for assessment, for art, for ICT, for special educational needs and for PSHE have provided good support and advice to staff. During the period of special measures, the management committee has made significant progress in offering both challenge and practical help.

Appendix – Information about the inspection

The Forest Education Centre was inspected in March 2003 by a Registered Inspector and a team of inspectors under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996. The inspection was critical of many aspects of the work of the centre and, in accordance with that Act, the centre was made subject to special measures because it was failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education.

The centre was visited by HMI in January, April and September 2004 to assess the progress it was making to implement its action plan and address the key issues in the inspection report of March 2003.

In January 2005, two HMI returned to inspect the centre for two days. The inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996, which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools the authority to cause any school to be inspected. The inspection was also deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act.

Fourteen lessons or parts of lessons and two tutorial sessions were inspected. The pupils' conduct was observed around the centre and on the playground at break and lunchtimes, and samples of their work were inspected. Discussions were held with the head of centre, the co-ordinator for PSHE, the special needs co-ordinator, the education welfare officer, the chair of the management committee and two officers from the LEA, and informally with other staff. A wide range of the centre's documentation was scrutinised. Account was taken of the evidence from previous monitoring inspections.

The inspection assessed the quality of education provided and the progress the centre has made, in particular in relation to the main findings and key issues in the inspection report of March 2003 and the action plan prepared by the LEA to address those key issues.

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