



Inspection report

Eston Lowfields Centre

**Better
education
and care**

Unique Reference Number 111520
LEA Redcar and Cleveland

Inspection number 274433
Inspection dates 9 and 10 March 2005
Reporting inspector Mr A Bennett 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	Normanby Road
School category	Pupil Referral Unit		Middlesbrough
			TS6 9AD
Age range of pupils	7 to 16 years		
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01642 440225
Number on roll	80	Fax number	01642 463751
Appropriate authority	The LEA	Chair of management committee	Mr H Joyce
Date of previous inspection	December 2003	Headteacher	Ms K Smith

Age group	Published	Reference no.
7 to 16 years	29 April 2005	274433

Introduction

When Eston Lowfields Centre was inspected in December 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 two occasions to monitor its progress, and re-inspected the centre in March 2005.

Description of the centre

Eston Lowfields Centre is situated in an urban residential area on the outskirts of Middlesbrough. There were 80 pupils on roll at the time of the inspection, only six of whom were below the age of 11. Twenty three of these pupils, including five below secondary age, were dual-registered with mainstream schools. The centre serves the Borough of Redcar and Cleveland and draws its pupils from a wide area. This includes industrial, residential and rural districts but the majority of the pupils come from homes that are disadvantaged economically or socially. Most pupils have been excluded from other schools, or are at risk of exclusion. Many have low academic attainment, notably weak skills in literacy and numeracy; 12, including four of the dual-registered pupils, have a formal Statement of Special Educational Need. In the past year, the centre has moved onto one site; adaptations to the building have created a bright, attractive and safe environment with improved specialist facilities. A new senior management team has been established and the number of temporary staff has been greatly reduced.

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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.

Following a period of turbulence in staffing and a lack of clear educational direction at the time of the previous inspection, the centre is led with commitment and vision by the headteacher, ably supported by other school managers and the management committee. Stability in staffing has been instrumental in improving the overall quality of provision; teaching is good overall. The importance of enabling pupils to gain national accreditation is acknowledged but there are inconsistencies in achievement between different subjects. Sound assessment procedures are developing and the pupils are encouraged to evaluate their progress in lessons; however, insufficient attention is given to meeting the specific requirements of the pupils' individual education plans. Although the new policy requires time to become fully effective, an increasing number of pupils are reintegrated successfully into mainstream schools. Staff work tirelessly at increasing the pupils' self-esteem; as a result, the pupils behave well although their attitudes to work sometimes lack commitment and enthusiasm. Overall, there is a palpable and justified air of optimism within the centre.

Improvement since the last inspection

Following the inspection of December 2003, the centre was required to address two broad areas for improvement: leadership and management, and learning and achievement. Good progress has been made with leadership and management, for example in clarifying the role of the centre within the local education authority's (LEA) broader provision for pupils educated otherwise than at school. New management structures and performance management systems underpin greater professional responsibility and development opportunities for teachers. The headteacher and chair of the management committee have worked hard to build closer relationships with local mainstream schools so as to improve the pupils' opportunities for successful reintegration. Good progress has been made in many aspects of learning and achievement, for example in the increase in accreditation, the successful development of a varied work-related curriculum, and the notable improvements in the pupils' rates of attendance and their behaviour. However, work remains to be done on improving the pace of learning in some lessons and sharpening provision for specific individual needs.

Capacity to improve

The centre is well placed to sustain its good progress. The headteacher leads an enthusiastic team of teachers and support assistants who are increasingly confident in taking responsibility for curriculum and pastoral initiatives. There is a rising trend in the proportion of pupils entered for national qualifications. An effective system of rewards and sanctions, underpinned by good teaching and a broad curriculum, has the potential to sustain substantial improvements already achieved in levels of attendance. Subject

expertise is available in most areas of the curriculum or is sought from outside providers. The centre monitors its work thoughtfully and honestly; the management committee evaluates its effectiveness rigorously. The LEA has supported the centre well and intends to assist further with identified development priorities.

What the centre should do to improve further

The centre's improvement plan is under discussion. The key priorities should be to:

- develop the leadership roles of co-ordinators and delegate to them greater accountability for further improving the centre's provision;
- ensure consistency of expectations and standards across all subject areas;
- improve the pupils' capacity for independent learning;
- further develop assessment procedures so that the pupils receive more information about the quality of their work, and how to improve it;
- improve the provision for pupils who have special educational needs.

Achievement and standards

The centre offers increasing academic challenge to its pupils and this is timely. In the 2004 end-of-Key Stage 3 tests, one pupil attained the expected Level 5 in English; four pupils attained this level in mathematics and two pupils in science. A number of results at Levels 3 and 4 were obtained. In the 2004 GCSE examinations, passes were achieved at grades C to G in English, mathematics, information and communication technology (ICT) and food technology. About one fifth of the pupils achieved four passes; one third achieved three passes and one half of the pupils achieved one or two passes. Results were better overall in mathematics than in other subjects. While some inconsistent achievement arises from the pupils' individual circumstances, subject co-ordinators do not share similarly high expectations or demand similar standards of work from the same pupils. Twenty one pupils gained the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) award, five at silver level. It is intended that Year 9 and 11 pupils on roll in the summer term will be entered for national qualifications wherever possible. The headteacher promotes keenly the centre's responsibility to provide academic challenge and opportunity for all pupils, both to ease and sustain reintegration into mainstream schools and to enhance post-16 choices.

Standards in lessons were generally below what would be expected of equivalent pupils in mainstream schools; however, the pupils' progress is monitored carefully and target setting is beginning to ensure that they are challenged appropriately. Where pupils underachieve, it is often because they lack self-confidence or enthusiasm for academic study, especially if previous schooling has been interrupted or otherwise unsuccessful. Insufficient account is taken of the needs of some pupils, especially those who have a Statement of Special

Educational Need. Individual education plans are seldom referred to in the teachers' planning or adapted to meet the specific demands of different subjects.

Personal development

The pupils' behaviour is generally good and sometimes very good in lessons and around the centre. Pupils with challenging behaviour are reprimanded appropriately; they accept the centre's rules, understanding what is right and wrong. Relationships between adults and pupils are good; the pupils are responsive because they enjoy respect and trust. The number of exclusions is low. The pupils' attitudes to learning are satisfactory but seldom better; when lessons are interesting, the pupils apply themselves well but too often they are compliant rather than enthusiastic. The pupils collaborate sensibly when encouraged to do so, but there are too few opportunities for them to develop their confidence as independent learners.

Compared with the same period last year, attendance has improved from 44 per cent to 69 per cent; it was close to 80 per cent in the lessons inspected. Punctuality to the centre and to lessons is good; the pupils are keen to benefit from what the centre offers them.

The provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory overall. Moral and cultural development is good in personal, social and health education and ASDAN lessons and through special events linked to charities, for which the pupils selflessly raise generous donations. Visitors and celebrations of traditions from other cultures are used effectively to reinforce the pupils' social and cultural development. The pupils responded enthusiastically to being given responsibility for decorating and furnishing their common room. Spiritual development is less well catered for, although a broader arts curriculum is being developed and provision for photography, in particular, triggers many pupils' sense of awe and wonder in the natural world. A group of pupils recently won second prize in a national photography competition and were proud to be presented to Her Majesty the Queen at the awards ceremony. High priority is given to promoting the pupils' understanding of healthy lifestyles.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching is good overall; it was satisfactory in one lesson, good in seven and very good in two. Unsatisfactory teaching was seen in only one lesson. This is a significant improvement since the previous inspection when much less teaching was good or better. The best lessons involved the pupils in talking and thinking for themselves. Skilful questioning encouraged them to expand initial statements and attempt to articulate ideas or feelings precisely and in detail. Where the teachers took risks, the pupils responded with high levels of engagement and effort. Where the teaching was less effective, it was because there were insufficient opportunities for the pupils to take responsibility for their learning; the teachers slowed the pace by talking too much, or allowed the pupils little choice in how to tackle tasks, so that their interest waned and they made limited progress. Support assistants make a positive, good-humoured contribution to most lessons; they know the pupils well and are skilled in encouraging independent effort and perseverance.

A systematic approach to assessment is taking shape, but most teachers still make too few formal references to ways in which the pupils might improve the quality of their work. Because relatively little written work is produced in some subjects, opportunities to give feedback to the pupils through marking are limited; consequently, they often lack awareness of the standards they have achieved and have little opportunity to revisit and consolidate previous learning. Routine end-of-lesson reviews often seem productive at the time, but their cumulative impact on the pupils' learning is not apparent.

The building has been upgraded to provide good specialist accommodation for ICT, food technology and art. Imaginative solutions are being pursued to overcome the lack of facilities and staffing in science; for example, theme days and the use of visiting staff from other schools. A good range of off-site vocational and work-related opportunities is available and these are well-tailored to individual needs.

The pupils are well cared for and supported. End-of-day reviews with tutors provide a secure forum for discussing a range of issues. The staff meeting that follows encourages rapid and efficient sharing of information that shapes future plans. Links with parents and the community are good. There are regular opportunities for parents to discuss their children's progress and attend social events. One parent and a parent governor representative sit on the management committee. The local community is increasingly aware at first hand of the centre's achievements.

Leadership and management

The headteacher's leadership and management are very good; her aspirations for the centre are challenging and exciting. She maintains a purposeful and approachable presence within the centre. She has established excellent relationships with pupils, staff and outside agencies, impressing everyone with her high standards. Management of the centre is good and improving; the headteacher's senior colleagues and middle managers accept their accountability for successfully implementing new developments. However, middle managers' roles are relatively new; most require further training and support in order to demonstrate leadership and monitor provision confidently in their areas of responsibility.

Strategic management is good. In consultation with the LEA and the management committee, senior staff have formulated protocols to clarify the function and purpose of the centre, notably in respect of reintegrating pupils into mainstream schools. They are constantly seeking to diversify the curriculum so that the pupils' enthusiasm can be captured and their attitudes to learning improved. Plans are carefully costed; good use is made of other providers within the community, many of whom have been sufficiently impressed by the culture and ethos of the centre to give willingly of their time and expertise.

The LEA and management committee provide very good support for the headteacher. Subject consultants from the LEA have helped with revising schemes of work and keeping staff abreast of developments in national strategies; officers have assisted in implementing new systems and procedures. The management committee adopts an appropriate questioning role as critical friend to the headteacher while promoting positively to the community all that the centre has achieved in recent months.

Appendix – Information about the inspection

Eston Lowfields Centre was inspected under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996 by a Registered Inspector and a team of inspectors in December 2003. 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 July and December 2004 to assess the progress it was making to implement its action plan and address the key issues in the inspection report of December 2003.

In March 2005, one HMI and one Additional Inspector 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.

Eleven lessons or part lessons and two end-of-day review sessions were inspected. The pupils' conduct was observed around the centre and in social areas at break and lunchtimes, and samples of their work were inspected. Discussions were held with the headteacher, other nominated staff, the chair of the management committee and a representative 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 areas for improvement in the inspection report of December 2003 and the action plan prepared by the LEA to address those key issues.

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