



Vernon House School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 101581
LEA Brent LEA
Inspection number 276543
Inspection dates 4 October 2005 to 4 October 2005
Reporting inspector Stuart Charlton AI

This inspection was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Special	School address	Drury Way
School category	Community special		London
Age range of pupils	5 to 11		NW10 0NQ
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	02084516961
Number on roll	28	Fax number	02088301352
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Ms P Anderson
Date of previous inspection	12 June 2000	Headteacher	Mr G S Davidson

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one additional inspector.

Description of the school

Vernon House is a small day Special School for pupils with complex emotional, behavioural and social difficulties. There are 28 pupils on roll, all of whom are boys. Pupils come from a wide area and approximately half are from Brent Local Education Authority (LEA). An increasing number of pupils are referred to the school after residential psychiatric assessment. The educational records of many pupils when they are admitted to the school are fragmented, but overall attainment on entry is very low. Most pupils are eligible for free school meals. The school is subject to ongoing re-organisation proposals which have been in place for a number of years.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The school judges itself to be good. The inspection team agree with this and was able to identify aspects of its work which are outstanding. It enables all pupils to make very significant progress in managing their own behaviours and re-engages them in learning. It is effective in helping them to develop the learning skills that they will need when they re-enter mainstream education. It has dealt with the changing needs of its population very successfully. The needs of the pupils have changed significantly since the last inspection and the way in which the school has responded to this shows that it has good capacity to improve further. All pupils achieve at least well and for some pupils, achievement is outstanding. The quality of teaching is good which promotes good learning. The headteacher sets a very clear vision for the school which is shared by all staff and he provides effective leadership and management. In the light of its success in re-integrating pupils into mainstream education, the school provides good value for money. The way in which the school records pupils' progress are informal but do not allow it to easily quantify and celebrate its success and provide a firm base for rigorous self evaluation.

What the school should do to improve further

The school must continue the work which it has already identified to: * formalise the systems which it uses to judge its success so that it can more easily celebrate its achievements; * develop a more robust and rigorous system to record pupils' progress.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Given their very low starting point, all pupils achieve well and for some their achievements are outstanding. However, because so many have been out of education for extended periods of time, even by the time they leave Vernon House, many have not fully managed to catch up in terms of their basic skills development. This means that the standards they attain are below what would be expected, although there are a few pupils who attain standards which align closely with those expected. Formal targets for improvement are not set, but the staff know their pupils very well and are adept in challenging them to manage their own behaviour. They re-engage pupils to the extent that most enjoy their learning and all are eager to come to school. The success which the school enjoys in re-integrating pupils into mainstream education fully justifies this approach. For example, this September, seven of the eight Year 6 leavers were re-integrated into mainstream secondary schools.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The school is very effective in promoting pupils' personal development and well being. Through its calm and consistent use of well-trying behaviour management strategies,

the school enjoys great success in challenging pupils to address and modify their behaviours. All adults who work with them provide stability and a consistency of approach. Consequently, behaviour overall is good, but given the starting point for most pupils the improvement they make in managing their own behaviour is excellent. The school places great emphasis on developing pupils' self-esteem through providing a safe and secure environment where learning is highly valued. A significant aspect of this is the rewards system of stamps and stickers. Pupils value this and respond very positively, significantly improving their general attitudes and particularly their attitudes to learning. Across the school, pupils' attitudes are good and for the older pupils their attitudes are excellent. The school has very good systems in place to help pupils, and their parents, to understand the need for regular attendance and these contribute very well to ensuring that overall attendance rates are very close to those which would be expected nationally. This represents very good improvement for all pupils. All adults provide good role models for the pupils enabling them to challenge and develop their moral and social skills. Parents commented very positively about how their child had become much more able to integrate socially into their local community. The school very successfully celebrates the diversity of the cultural backgrounds of its pupils. The school provides good opportunities through lessons and assemblies for pupils to develop their spiritual awareness. Overall, the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is excellent. Through lessons, and the Speed and Quickness (SAQ) programme, pupils are encouraged and enabled to adopt healthy lifestyles. In all aspects of its work the school places great emphasis on safety and developing pupils' understanding of the need for safe practice in all areas of life. Pupils are well prepared for life after Vernon House through being taught to co-operate effectively with others and through developing their independence. The school actively engages with its local community by providing a site and facilities for a local Youth Club once a week and holds an annual winter musical and drama production.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The overall quality of teaching and learning is good and much is very good. All adults are very experienced in working with pupils who have extreme emotional and behavioural difficulties. A significant strength is the totally consistent way in which they apply the school's behaviour management strategies and the rewards system. This establishes a secure and stable learning environment in which pupils feel valued. They know the pupils very well and use this to successfully nurture and develop their learning. The small class sizes and high ratio of adult to pupils enable this approach to be successful, but the only records which the school keeps pupils' progress is through their work books. This does not enable quantifiable targets to be set through which the school can quickly evaluate its effectiveness and celebrate its achievements.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum has been well adapted to meet the needs of pupils. There is very strong emphasis across the school in developing pupils' literacy, numeracy and basic learning skills. The school uses music very effectively to establish a purposeful learning environment and develop pupils' skills. The introduction and use of the SAQ has been very successful in engaging pupils' interest and developing their self-esteem. All pupils are brought into school by bus and this limits the extra-curricular activities which can be offered. However, the school football team trains regularly and has won the Cedars Special Schools cup for the last two years. Regular trips are made to local firms and supermarkets as well as to places further afield such as the Tate Modern art gallery. These are an integral part of developing pupils' social skills and are highly valued by both pupils and their parents.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Pupils and parents speak very highly of the excellent care and guidance which the school provides. The nature of pupils' needs means that the school has to pay attention to a very wide range of statutory requirements including the use of restraint and the administration of medicines. All these requirements are fully met and all adults receive regular update training where this is required. The school meets the requirements of the Special Educational Needs (SEN) Code of Practice in full and is very successful in engaging parents in helping to map the future of their child. The effectiveness of these procedures and strategies is seen in the safe and secure environment which the school provides. Pupils speak very highly of the staff and value the care and support they receive. These strong relationships and mutual respect are an important aspect of the school's success.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The leadership and management of the school is good. The headteacher provides a very clear vision for the work of the school and all staff fully support this. All adults worked together as a team very well and this is an important factor in the school's success. By working closely with individuals the headteacher has established a very experienced and very stable staffing base. The way in which the school has responded to the changing needs of the pupils has been very well managed and this demonstrates clearly that the school has good capacity to improve. The Governing Body support the school well. Since the last inspection, it has incorporated several new members to strengthen the core of experienced and long standing personnel. It now holds the school to account and has identified the need to formalise the systems the school uses to monitor and evaluate its performance. The school regularly canvasses the views of parents and these are supplemented by informal contacts with the many parents who visit the school. The wide ranging needs of the pupils has meant that the school has

developed very good relationships with many outside agencies including Social Services and the LEA and local NHS Trust Mental Health Psychological Services. The school's considerable strength in its staff is also a weakness. The experience and stability in staffing has lessened the need for the school to formalise and develop quantifiable systems to record pupil progress through which it can monitor and evaluate its provision. Although at present these systems are informal and successful, they would not serve the school well if the number of pupils on roll were to increase, or staff were to leave.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	2	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	NA

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	NA
The behaviour of learners	2	NA
The attendance of learners	2	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	NA

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	NA

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	2	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	NA
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	NA

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you for all the help you gave to me when I visited your school on 4 October. My discussions with you ensured that I had a clear view of how much you appreciated what the school is doing to help you.

You told me that Vernon House is a good school and that it cares for you and supports you very well indeed. I agree with you and could see how well it was doing in helping you to manage your behaviour and get you back into learning about a wide range of subjects. You explained very well how the school is helping you to develop your literacy, numeracy and other basic learning skills. You all told me how much you enjoyed music and SAQ lessons and the music assemblies. These are undoubtedly helping you to develop healthy lifestyles and giving you the chance to try out new skills. All of you were very quick to tell me how good your teachers are. They are good and they make lessons enjoyable and interesting. More than that they know you and what makes you tick very well but they are always fair and honest in the way that they work with you.

There are two things which the school needs to improve. Teachers need to keep more detailed records about how you are doing rather than relying on your work books. Mr. Davidson needs to use these records to show people outside school how well it is doing in helping you to get back into a mainstream school.