



Stepping Stones School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 119103
LEA Lancashire
Inspection number 280465
Inspection dates 21 November 2005 to 21 November 2005
Reporting inspector David Smith

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

Type of school	Pupil referral unit	School address	Bowerham Road, Lancaster, Lancashire, , LA1 4HT
School category	Pupil referral unit	Telephone number	01524 67164
Age range of pupils	4 to 11	Fax number	01524 841239
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Chair of governors	Mr Andrew Murphy
Number on roll	14	Headteacher	Mrs Julie Ashton
Appropriate authority	The governing body		
Date of previous inspection	1 September 2000		

Age group 4 to 11	Inspection dates 21 November 2005 - 21 November 2005	Inspection number 280465
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an additional inspector.

Description of the school

Stepping Stones is a pupil referral unit providing education for up to 24 boys and girls. At the time of the inspection there were 13 boys and 1 girl on roll. They come from the Morecambe and Lancaster districts. No pupil is in the Foundation Stage. Two pupils have statements of special educational need and five pupils are undergoing assessment. Virtually all pupils are White-British and no pupil speaks English as an additional language. More than half are eligible for free school meals. One pupil is in public care.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The inspection confirms the school's view that its overall effectiveness is satisfactory. Pupils are happy and, as a result, their attendance is good. They have good relationships with staff and behave well. Parents have confidence in the school and appreciate the good care and support provided for their children. Teaching and learning and, as a result, pupils' achievement are satisfactory overall. Pupils in Years 1 and 2 are taught well and their achievement is good. The curriculum is satisfactory but pupils have too little involvement in the local and wider community. Teamwork is strong and there is a shared ambition to improve the quality of the provision. The school provides satisfactory value for money.

Most of the weaknesses identified in the last inspection have been dealt with. Improvements have been made to the quality of teaching and learning. Shortcomings in the budget have been rectified and the management committee is now fully established and effective. However, there still remains the need to strengthen the roles of subject coordinators. The headteacher has been building a new staff team and, consequently, progress since the last inspection has been satisfactory rather than good as judged by the school. However, significant progress has been made in recent months and the inspection confirms that the school is now in a good position to drive forward continual improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the achievement of pupils in Years 3 to 6 by making full use of the time available and ensuring their work is challenging.
- Extend the role of subject coordinators by providing training and opportunities for them to monitor the quality of teaching and learning.
- Extend pupils' understanding of their own and other cultures by increasing their involvement in the local and wider community.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

The standards of attainment are below those found nationally which is unsurprising as the pupils have experienced considerable disruption to their education. Pupils' achievement is satisfactory which matches the school's evaluation. Pupils in Years 1 and 2 work well towards their challenging targets, particularly in literacy and numeracy, and achieve well. The pupils in Years 3 to 6 make more variable progress. In particular, higher ability pupils are not fully challenged and, as a result, overall achievement is satisfactory rather than good. Targets are clearly displayed and pupils make good progress towards their personal targets and this helps to promote their good personal development. Pupils who require additional support, for example with their reading, are identified and this helps to boost their progress. Pupils with special educational needs and those in public care achieve as well as their peers. Pupils are proud of their achievements and enjoy showing their work to the rest of the school in the daily

meeting. Staff have developed more accurate assessments of the levels of pupils' work. This enables satisfactory whole- school, group and individual targets to be set. They are now in the position to use assessment data to compare achievement with pupils in similar schools. This comparison will help to ensure that challenging targets are set for all pupils and promote consistently good achievement.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Inspection findings confirm the school's judgement that personal development is good. The school effectively extends pupils' understanding of how to lead a healthy lifestyle. Pupils eat fruit at break time and have the opportunity to take part in regular physical exercise. They enjoy their time in school and, as a result, both their attendance and punctuality are good. Pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is good and their cultural development is satisfactory. The school recognises the need to strengthen links with the local and wider community so that pupils can gain a better understanding of their own and other cultures. The daily meetings are a particularly strong feature of school life and help to promote good relationships and a positive school ethos. Pupils are encouraged to express their views and are supportive of each other. Their behaviour has improved and is now good. The use of exclusion and the number of serious incidents have significantly decreased in recent months. Parents are pleased with the children's personal development and one commented that, 'The behaviour of our child is fantastic compared to when he started at the school'. Pupils in Years 1 and 2 develop a good approach to their work that prepares them well for their return to mainstream education. However, pupils in Years 3 to 6 have more variable attitudes and have a satisfactory rather than good work ethic.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory which matches the schools' own evaluation. Teaching and learning are good for pupils in Years 1 and 2 and satisfactory for pupils in Years 3 to 6. The contribution of the teaching assistants is a consistently good feature. Relationships are good and behaviour management is consistent. The use of assessment is satisfactory overall although there is good practice in Years 1 and 2 and this leads to the setting of precise targets that challenge pupils to achieve well. Expectations are consistently high and all the available time is fully used. Teaching does not effectively challenge the full range of pupils' abilities in Years 3 to 6 and, as a result, their achievement is satisfactory rather than good. In particular, when pupils finish their work early, suitable additional work is not provided. Where the introduction to a lesson is too long, pupils lose interest, become distracted and learning time is lost. The school is working to extend pupils' ability to assess their own progress and this will give them a better understanding of how to improve their work and achieve well.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Inspectors agree with the school that the curriculum and other activities are satisfactory. There has been a strong focus on improving the curriculum. It now matches the requirements of the National Curriculum and this prepares pupils well for a return to mainstream schools. The curriculum also meets the learning needs of an increasing number of pupils with special educational needs. The school ensures that the curriculum is matched to the learning needs of the few girls in the school. There has been an effective focus on the development of English, mathematics and personal, social and health education across the school. Technological resources are now good and there are plans to make more effective use of information and communication technology in other subjects. Pupils are made aware of the dangers of smoking and substance abuse and they particularly enjoyed a healthy school week. Attractive displays celebrate pupils' achievement and stimulate their learning. Access to a hall for physical education is appreciated and many pupils stated that, 'physical education lessons are my favourite'. The development of a garden area is an exciting initiative that enriches the curriculum. Pupils have too few opportunities to visit the local and wider community.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The inspection confirms the school view that pupils' care, guidance and support are good. The ethos of the school is positive and supportive and good care is taken of all the pupils. The staff team is fully committed to pupils' welfare and helping them to develop healthy lifestyles. Child protection procedures are well-established and appropriate training is provided to keep staff up-to-date. The environment is generally safe and detailed risk assessments are carried out. The staff team has received appropriate training in behaviour management. Effective procedures are in place to record and report any serious incidents. Pupils have clear behaviour targets and their development is carefully monitored. They are aware of the consequences of their actions and encouraged to take responsibility. Daily school meetings provide a wealth of opportunities to support and guide pupils. Pupils are supportive of each other and help to promote a positive ethos. Consequently, pupils who are new to the school settle in quickly. Pupils are confident that they have staff to talk to if they have any concerns. The school works well with other agencies to promote pupils' well-being.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The inspection agrees with the school that leadership and management are satisfactory. Parents and carers have confidence in the leadership and are very appreciative of the impact the school has on their children's lives. The school has been through a challenging period following the last inspection. Improvements since then have been satisfactory, overall, rather than good as judged by the school. However, recent improvements have been good and this has raised staff morale. The headteacher is

highly ambitious for the school and has established a stable and consistent staff team that work very well together. In particular, the leadership team has been strengthened with the appointment of the deputy headteacher. Consequently, there is now a cohesive management team that is committed to the success of the school.

Self-evaluation is open and honest and staff share the ambition to make the provision outstanding.

Staffing levels are very good and resources are good. The staff team is more confident since the introduction of consistent and effective behaviour management systems.

The school leaders recognise the need to extend the role of the subject coordinators. This was an issue identified in the last inspection and their role needs to include the monitoring of teaching and learning to help increase pupils' progress. The management committee has a wealth of relevant experience, meet their statutory responsibilities and provide particularly good support and challenge. They know the school very well and are confident in its capacity for further improvement.

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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?	3	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	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	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?	3	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	NA

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	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	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3	NA

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	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?	3	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	3	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	3	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

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22 November 2005

Dear Pupils

I thoroughly enjoyed my visit to your school. You made me feel very welcome and I particularly enjoyed watching you play during the breaks. I hope that someone will read out my letter at one of your school meetings. Thank you for talking to me about your work and activities.

This is what I found out about your school.

Your headteacher, in particular, is very determined for the school to improve.

Everyone works well as a team including the management committee.

Your attendance at school is good.

You get on well together and behave well.

Your parents appreciate the work the school does.

The pupils in Years 1 and 2 do some particularly good work.

I am sure you appreciate how well you are looked after and cared for by the staff.

Even though I thought your school was satisfactory, I asked Mrs Ashton, the teachers and management committee to improve the following areas.

I am aware that you work hard and enjoy your work. However, I am suggesting that some pupils in Years 3 to 6 could do even harder work.

I think you should have more opportunities to gain a better understanding of the way people from different cultures live.

I understand that teachers are busy, but they need to spend more time looking at the subjects they are in charge of when they are taught by other teachers.

I hope that you continue to work hard, enjoy your learning and help the headteacher and staff to make your school good in every way.

Yours sincerely

David Smith

(Lead inspector)

Annex B