



The Park Education Support Centre

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 130348
LEA HERTFORDSHIRE LEA
Inspection number 282137
Inspection dates 21 November 2005 to 21 November 2005
Reporting inspector Ms. Sue Aldridge LI

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

Type of school	Special	School address	New Barnfield
School category	Pupil referral unit		AL10 8XG
Age range of pupils	11 to 16		
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01707281460
Number on roll	24	Fax number	01707 281465
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr.Peter Brown
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable	Headteacher	Mrs. Gill Dunton

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11 to 16	21 November 2005 - 21 November 2005	282137

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

The Park Education Support Centre (ESC) is a pupil referral unit that provides education for pupils who have been permanently excluded from schools, or who are at risk of exclusion. When it was last inspected, it provided education on the site for primary and secondary pupils. Arrangements changed in February 2002, and it now teaches pupils from 11 to 16 on its site and provides outreach to 71 primary schools and 9 secondary schools. Pupils in Years 7 to 9 receive all their tuition on the site whereas pupils in Years 10 and 11 follow one-year examination courses on the site. Year 11 students attend the centre for 10 hours a week and attend Youth Programmes for the remainder of the week. There are 24 pupils on roll, 19 are boys and five are girls. Most of the pupils are white, whilst one boy is of mixed race. All pupils speak English as their first language. There are two pupils being assessed for a statement of special educational needs. Half of the pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is a very high proportion. At present there are no travellers on roll and no pupils are in public care. When pupils arrive at the centre, they have a range of abilities, skills and disabilities, and a variety of patterns of attendance. Their attainment is relatively low when they join the ESC because they have had poor attendance, or have had long periods out of school because of exclusion. The principal aim of the centre is to return pupils to mainstream schools.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The Park sees itself as an effective pupil referral unit and the inspection confirms this view. By providing a good quality of education, it gets pupils back on track, improves their attitudes and behaviour and is very successful in improving pupils' attendance. As a result, pupils' academic achievements are good, and their life chances improve considerably. It also re-integrates a good proportion of pupils into mainstream schools. Schools that receive outreach support from staff at the ESC show high levels of satisfaction with this. The ESC is very well led and managed. The headteacher and management committee provide very strong leadership, and staff with management responsibilities discharge their duties well. Self-evaluation is well established, although there is scope for better measurement of the improvements made in behaviour. There has been an impressive level of improvement since the last inspection and all of the key issues have been successfully addressed. In particular, the ESC now provides pupils with a range of visits and visitors, which enrich the curriculum. Provision could be further strengthened by giving pupils opportunities to contribute to the wider community. Staff have been responsive to changing needs and situations, showing flexibility and a willingness to be innovative. The ESC successfully accesses several sources of funding to supplement its basic budget and provides very good value for money. The ESC has the capacity to be outstanding and is working with the local authority to remove barriers to further improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Provide pupils with more opportunities to make a contribution to the wider community.
- Use suitable measurements to show improvements in pupils' behaviour.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

During their time at the ESC, pupils achieve well. When they enter the centre, pupils have fallen behind their mainstream peers because of disruption to their schooling. In general, levels of attainment on entry range between Level 1 and Level 5. Once they settle, pupils start to make rapid progress. Since the centre was last inspected, its results have improved each year. Individual pupils in Years 7 to 9, most of whom spend roughly 8 weeks at the centre, improve their reading comprehension skills and become more confident in reading aloud and in test situations. Because they are at the centre for a short period, it is difficult to measure academic gains, but most reach the personal targets set for them. A few pupils who have a longer stay in Years 7 to 9 reach the targets set for them in the National Tests in Year 9. In the summer of 2005, five pupils took tests and in a majority of cases achieved Levels 4 or 5. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 receive an increasing range of accreditation, and grades get better each year. For instance, in the summer of 2004, over half of Year 11 pupils following a one-year course achieved C or D grades in GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education) English, mathematics and science; in the summer of 2005 this rose to 76%.

In Year 11, there have been similar improvements in New CLAIT results (Computer Literacy and Information Technology) and AQA Adult Literacy and Numeracy. Year 10 pupils who follow the one-year course achieve a range of certificates including unit certificates for New CLAIT and Entry level certificates in literacy and numeracy.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils dramatically improve their attendance whilst at the ESC. Individual gains, from non-attendance at school to attendance around 60% at the centre, are common. The centre's attendance figure for 2004/05 was 87% and this compares favourably with statistics from similar centres in Hertfordshire. It indicates a high level of enjoyment of the centre's provision. Pupils also improve their behaviour. Most pupils comply successfully with the centre's code but, in a small number of cases, pupils are permanently excluded because of violence. Staff report that pupils reach their personal behaviour targets but have not carried out any analysis to support this. Pupils behave well in class and around the centre. They establish good relationships with staff and show respect for resources and displays. Occasionally, pupils who experience a longer stay at the centre become disheartened and their behaviour fluctuates. Younger pupils at risk of exclusion in primary and infant schools remain in their schools as a result of the good quality interventions by the outreach team. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They show increased self-awareness and self-esteem, and are proud to talk about their work, which is frequently neatly presented. Pupils understand and respect the few rules that are made for them; know well what the rewards and sanctions are, and respond positively to the high expectations of staff. Pupils show empathy for others who are less fortunate, and willingly raise funds for charities. They become more tolerant of differences between people, and racist comments are rare. Pupils get on well with one another, and are polite to visitors. Pupils respond well to the encouragement from staff to adopt healthy lifestyles. They take part enthusiastically in physical activities such as wall climbing, trampolining and fitness training, and a few choose to walk to these activities rather than travel by bus. All pupils respect the rules made for their own safety, and they become better at dealing with their own frustration without resorting to violence. Pupils have contributed well to the centre's environment by working in a team to renovate a pleasant garden and pond area. Older pupils successfully complete work experience, and receive positive reports from employers, who find them punctual, well behaved and willing. One pupil particularly impressed an employer by taking responsibility, showing initiative and volunteering to work late. Pupils are well prepared for the next step. Those who re-integrate into mainstream schools are rarely excluded again, and 60% of pupils in Years 7 to 9 made this move last year. Year 10 pupils successfully transfer to Youth Programmes and, last summer, all pupils in Year 11 went on to further education or training.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The good adult to pupil ratio at the centre, and the well-developed skills of most staff mean that pupils are effectively supported in lessons. Teachers plan tasks that appeal to pupils, so pupils are highly engaged during lessons and make good progress towards the learning objectives. These objectives are shared with pupils at the start of lessons, and pupils are involved in reviewing their learning, attitudes and behaviour at the end of each lesson. Feedback is given regularly throughout the lesson, as well as encouragement, so that pupils are motivated to continue trying even when they find the going difficult. Inconsistencies in teachers' marking, identified in a recent LEA review, are being addressed. When pupils enter the centre they are carefully assessed and information provided by their former school is also taken into account. As a result, staff know pupils and their abilities well. They combine this information with their own assessment of pupils' preferred learning styles, and provide work that is both challenging and enjoyable for pupils. For instance, in a science lesson about conditions on other planets, pupils showed their knowledge by writing a postcard from one of the planets, as though they were on holiday there. When pupils find it difficult to sustain good behaviour in class, they are taught individually for a period of time. This is effective in sustaining learning, and pupils often request a move back to lessons with their peers when they feel better able to cope in a group. Most staff are good at managing pupils' behaviour. They show their respect for pupils, and retain a calm demeanour, which is successful in dealing with minor outbursts.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum has developed considerably since the last inspection. It is now well enriched by centre days with a particular focus, as well as by visits and visitors. A suitable programme of personal, social, health and citizenship education has been added. The centre is in the process of further developing enterprise education and the requirements for work-related learning are met well. A good breadth of subjects ensures that pupils continue to develop academically, physically and personally during their time at the centre. There are good opportunities for pupils to follow accredited courses. The flexibility and skills of staff are used to good effect in providing for individual needs and changing circumstances. For instance, there is no maths specialist at present, because of recruitment difficulties, but three staff are effectively sharing the responsibility between them. A former teaching assistant is now a fully trained information and communication (ICT) co-ordinator and team leader. As circumstances have changed, staff have been innovative in their response. The one-year course now provided in Year 10 provides a mix of work experience, examinations and vocational courses and is tailored to pupils' individual needs and career aspirations. The Year 11 curriculum, which is provided in conjunction with Youth Programmes, focuses on core subject examination courses and prepares pupils well for work or further education.

Outreach work in secondary, primary and infant schools effectively involves individuals or groups of pupils. Programmes are designed to boost pupils' self-esteem, by helping them to understand their feelings and worries, and to develop coping strategies, to good effect.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The arrangements for keeping pupils safe are good. All staff have received training in child protection and the centre's procedures are in line with local requirements. Risk assessments, for individuals as well as events such as visits, are rigorously carried out and suitable action taken to ensure pupils' safety. A good range of policies guides the centre's work in this respect. Support for pupils with special educational needs is very good. Often, pupils enter the centre with needs that have not yet been identified, or assessment has been carried out but a statement has not been forthcoming. The centre's special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) is vigilant, has a thorough knowledge of special educational needs, and works closely with parents and staff to support pupils. Suitable individual education plans are in place for pupils who have additional needs. Good links with a wide range of external agencies help to secure the support that these children need. Pupils have access to a counsellor, and courses in anger management; Year 10 pupils have personal mentors through a link with the local university. The Connexions service provides guidance and support for pupils making the transition from the centre to a college or training course. Pupils who are re-integrated are well supported during the transition from the centre to a secondary school, and this ensures that the move is successful. Staff from the ESC work in close partnership with schools that admit centre pupils, and placements are kept under careful review. Outreach staff support well those pupils who would otherwise be at risk of exclusion from mainstream schools.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher provides very good leadership. She sets the tone for the centre by demonstrating respect for her pupils and staff, and empowers the staff by ensuring that there are good opportunities for them to continue to develop professionally. She successfully encourages teamwork, and has established a calm and purposeful ethos in the centre. She has a very clear vision for how the centre's provision can be further improved. This is clearly set out in a three-year strategic plan, supplemented by a further development plan for the current year. The management committee shares her vision, holds staff to account and provides good support. For instance, the chair is currently working with the headteacher to extend the use of data on pupils' achievements, to ensure that the targets set are challenging. Management responsibilities are allocated to staff for specific subjects and areas of the school's work; staff carry these out well. Financial management is good. A large surplus carried forward last financial year is satisfactorily explained by delays in extending the accommodation, which is now very good. Recent monitoring reports show that the

surplus is set to reduce to a sensible contingency at the end of the current financial year. Funds from the budget and other sources are well targeted on planned improvements, and developments carefully evaluated to make sure that money has been spent wisely. The centre is well resourced, particularly with ICT equipment. Self evaluation gives a clear indication of how well the centre is doing its work. It involves stakeholders well; pupils in the centre and in outreach schools, parents, and staff in supported schools contribute to the process, and for outreach provision the process dovetails with LEA evaluations. The small number of parents who responded to the inspection questionnaire were positive about all aspects of its provision. The centre has the potential to be even more successful, but there are certain barriers to further improvement. The delay in moving pupils on who are awaiting statements or placements reduces the centre's capacity to act as a 'revolving door'. The centre has also been unable to recruit a suitable mathematics specialist.

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	NA	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?	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	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?	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?	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	2	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	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

I very much enjoyed my visit to The Park yesterday. Thank you to those who gave me your views. I came to find out how well you are all doing and whether there are any things that could be done better. The main things that are going well are: - you all improve your attendance and behaviour while you are at the Park, and quite a lot of pupils successfully return to mainstream schools - pupils in Year 11 do well to pass so many examination courses in such a short time - most of the teaching is good so you make good progress, even if you are only at the centre for a short time - staff at the centre give you very good support if you have difficulties, and you appreciate this - many of you enjoy your time at the ESC - the centre is very well led by your headteacher and management committee. There are two things that could be done better. These are - giving pupils more opportunities to contribute to the local community - measuring improvements in your behaviour. I hope that you will continue to do well and I wish you all a happy Christmas!