



Newcastle Bridges School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 133714
LEA Newcastle upon Tyne
Inspection number 282339
Inspection dates 28 September 2005 to 29 September 2005
Reporting inspector Alastair Younger

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

Type of school	Special	School address	Royal Victoria Infirmary
School category	Community special		c/o Ward 10
Age range of pupils	2 to 19		Queen Victoria Road, Newcastle Upon Tyne NE1 4LP
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	0191 2330764
Number on roll	168	Fax number	0191 2330765
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Councillor David Down
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable	Headteacher	Mrs Margaret Dover

Age group 2 to 19	Inspection dates 28 September 2005 - 29 September 2005	Inspection number 282339
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector

Description of the school

This is a hospital teaching school. It operates on seven sites:

- The Royal Victoria Infirmary – mainly for pupils of all ages who have to be regularly readmitted for treatment for dialysis, cancer treatment and cystic fibrosis
- The Freeman Hospital – mainly for shorter stay pupils of all ages, but also for heart transplant patients
- The Newcastle General Hospital – mainly for pupils of all ages with acquired brain injury, oncology or neurological problems
- The Fleming Nuffield Unit – for pupils of all ages with extreme psychiatric problems
- The Young People’s Unit – for pupils of secondary school age with extreme psychiatric problems (provides full-time education)
- Ashlyn’s – for pregnant schoolgirls and nursing mothers, also incorporating a nursery for the pupils’ babies (provides full time education)
- Harbour West – a unit for anxious and school phobic pupils of secondary school age (provides full time education)

The school also manages a home tuition service for sick children.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The headteacher very accurately describes the school's effectiveness as good and providing good value for money. It has the ambition to keep improving and a good capacity to do so. It successfully promotes good learning and personal development amongst a group of pupils who have very good reasons for not realising their importance. Parents, most of the pupils, the schools they normally attend and medical staff are as one in praising the school for its effectiveness. Partnerships with all of these parties, and a multitude of other professionals and agencies, are outstanding. As well as helping as many pupils as possible to return successfully to school, or to succeed in work or study beyond it, the relationships have attracted substantial funding for extending and improving provision.

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- The school has many more strengths than weaknesses. All groups of pupils achieve well; they are well taught on all of the sites, are provided with a well balanced range of academic and developmental activities and are well cared for in safe and reassuring environments. As a result, pupils' attitudes to learning and their enthusiasm to achieve success are outstanding. This is all made possible by good leadership and management. In a relatively short time the headteacher has brought together a group of dedicated and skilled individuals to form a very good staff team. They share their expertise and experience for the benefit of all pupils and the improvement of the school. What has not happened yet is the development of systems to help the school to compare the progress of pupils in different units to help it to plan and provide for even greater improvement.
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What the school should do to improve further

The school should make better use of the information it collects about the progress of individual pupils to help it to evaluate itself more precisely.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

All groups of pupils achieve well. This is the school's opinion and it is shared by the inspector, the vast majority of parents and all the pupils who were spoken to. Standards are broadly average overall, varying from pupils who are performing above national expectations to those who are only able to communicate or perform at a very basic level. Frequent interruptions to learning for medical treatment or, as with pupils at Harbour West, long periods out of school before being admitted, are the main factors depressing standards. Nevertheless, progress is good, varying from learning how to communicate with the tiniest body movements following catastrophic brain damage, to studying for 'A' level examinations whilst receiving dialysis. Individual education plans are very good, with precisely identified targets which challenge pupils. Individual

targets are met with a good degree of success. They are frequently reviewed and new ones set.

Prior attainment is not a major factor in measuring pupils' progress because many pupils have deteriorating and occasionally life-threatening conditions. Many pupils in Newcastle General Hospital, for instance, have good prior attainment but have suffered such devastating injury that their learning has to start all over again.

Pupils at Harbour West, Ashlyn's and the Young People's Unit achieve remarkable success in GCSE examinations. Last year, for instance, all pupils gained passes in at least one subject and about a third gained passes in five or more subjects. There were fewer entries at the Young People's Unit but 72 percent of the passes were with grades of A – C. Pupils receiving home tuition make good progress, allowing many to successfully return to their home schools.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development and well-being is good, with some particularly strong features. An outstanding feature is the evident enjoyment of pupils as they revel in their education. Pupils concentrate and work very hard, even whilst treatment, such as dialysis, or action to relieve discomfort, is ongoing. Pupils talk enthusiastically about what they have learned. A Year 4 pupil at the Royal Victoria Infirmary being a good example as he spoke proudly about the fact that, even though he has to keep coming back to hospital for long periods, he never falls behind his friends at school.

Also exceptional is the contribution the school makes to pupils' future economic well-being. Literacy and numeracy skills are well taught and pupils, especially those who have previously been increasingly isolated and anxious, are encouraged to work together whenever circumstances allow. A good measure of pupils' progress at Ashlyn's and Harbour West is the very high number of pupils returning to mainstream school or moving on to work or further study when they leave. This reflects the strong work-related curriculum and extensive support for careers education.

Pupils attend whenever they can and there is particular success in getting anxious and phobic pupils and nursing mothers to attend regularly. Pupils on the wards provide a 'captive' audience but they rarely make excuses to get out of learning or to waste time. Pupils' moral, social and cultural development is good and their spiritual development is satisfactory. There are good procedures to ensure the protection and safety of pupils. There is also a strong focus on getting pupils to eat healthily and to take as much exercise as possible.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The headteacher and senior staff frequently observe lessons and as a result have accurately described teaching and learning as good. Parents are virtually unanimous in their praise of teaching and pupils agree. Virtually all of the teaching observed was good and records show that this is usually the case. There is no record of any unsatisfactory teaching in recent years. A strong feature of teaching is the skill of staff in quickly establishing the level at which pupils should be working. As a result, pupils are nearly always working at a level which keeps them challenged and interested. An excellent biology lesson was seen in the Royal Victoria Hospital, when a girl recovering from a bone marrow transplant was encouraged to relate to her own experiences as she learned about the structure of blood through a particularly innovative experiment. Teachers are very sensitive to the physical needs of pupils and very quick to respond to those who are in discomfort or becoming fatigued. A strong feature of many lessons, especially on the hospital wards, is their pace. This is especially important as they are often short, having to be fitted in between treatment and other hospital procedures. The only weaknesses identified in teaching were the few occasions when this pace slipped or when, at times, teachers did too much of the talking rather than involving pupils through their own experiences and views.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

There is a good curriculum. This is exactly as the school evaluates it. There is no requirement for hospital schools to teach the whole of the National Curriculum but the school does so as far as possible when time permits. Other than on the hospital wards and for those receiving home tuition, pupils receive full time education. At Ashlyn's this is greatly helped by the provision of a good nursery which allows mothers to study all day, knowing that their babies are safe and being well cared for. At the Young People's Unit the curriculum focuses strongly on pupils' personal, social and health education. This is entirely fitting as it helps the pupils in this unit to overcome their most pressing challenges. At Harbour West, pupils take particularly good advantage of many enrichment activities provided for by the host school. Drama productions have been a particular success.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school feels that these areas are an outstanding success. In the main this is true but there are small weaknesses, such as the lack of an incident book or register of racial incidents. There are virtually no such incidents but it is good practice to keep the former and a legal requirement for the latter. Nevertheless, child protection procedures are carefully observed and all staff have received training. Risk in all

activities is carefully assessed, taking special account of added risk which relates to pupils' medical and mental conditions. Health and safety issues are quickly identified and action is prompt when potential problems are identified. Parents are very happy with the care, guidance and support their children receive.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

In line with the school's self-evaluation, leadership and management are good. Over a relatively short period the exceptionally determined headteacher has brought her vision for an effective school to fruition. Staff from different backgrounds have been brought together and now share their expertise very effectively, to the benefit of learners. Communication has been greatly improved and there is a strong sense of identity and pride. It is this that provides convincing evidence that the school is constantly seeking improvement and has a good capacity to do so. Administration is a strength of the school. It explains why such a complex organisation runs so smoothly and attracts the admiration of its many partners and stakeholders.

The headteacher has a good view of the school's strengths and weaknesses, especially in teaching, which is closely monitored. The school has identified, as key priorities, the need to improve formal systems for demonstrating pupils' attainment and progress and their personal development. It has made a start to the latter by using a 'Whole Child Attributes Assessment' combined with a pupil self-assessment questionnaire. These are providing good information but it is not yet being sufficiently analysed or used to monitor pupils' progress. The school also has access to good quality information about individual pupils' academic progress. Teachers keep comprehensive records and very precise targets are set in individual education plans. Once again, however, insufficient use is made of this information to make comparisons between the effectiveness of different forms of provision or to better inform improvement planning.

The governing body is strongly supportive and meets regularly. It frequently lobbies the local education authority to ensure that the needs of the school are not overlooked and finance is managed carefully. What it is not doing enough of is finding out for itself more about the progress the pupils are making or the ways in which staff are meeting with so much success.

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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?	1	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	2	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?	2	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	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	1	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	2	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	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	1	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	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	3	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

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Newcastle Bridges School

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September 30th 2005

Dear Pupils,

A few of you may remember me popping in to see you and to look at your school a short while ago. There are a lot of you and the different parts of the school are a long way apart, so I couldn't get to see you all, but thank you to all those of you who took the time to have a chat with me. You were very helpful and it was especially heart-warming to see how hard you are trying, even when it must be very difficult for you at times.

When I was in your school I was looking for things that were particularly good or which, perhaps, needed improving. One of the best things I noticed was your enthusiasm for learning and your desire to do well. Many of you are getting to the age where you will be thinking about leaving and possibly finding jobs or going to college. Looking at the success that past pupils have had I think you can be reassured that you are being well prepared for both. It was also wonderful to see how so many people work so effectively together to help you. I bet a lot of you don't realise how many people are on to your case; all the medical staff as well as the teachers, then there are the staff in your home schools, your parents, therapists and dozens of others. Your headteacher is great, I was amazed how many of you she knew, and how much she knew about all of you. She's very determined to keep making the school better.

The only important thing that I felt could be improved is the way the school keeps track of your progress. I felt that if it developed better systems for doing this it could be more sure that everyone is working as hard as they can.

All the best, and good luck for the future. Get well soon.

Alastair Younger

(Lead inspector)

Annex B