



The Base

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 134310
LEA Milton Keynes LEA
Inspection number 282546
Inspection dates 16 May 2006 to 16 May 2006
Reporting inspector Margaret Goodchild AI

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Galley Hill Education Centre
School category	Pupil referral unit		Stony Stratford
Age range of pupils	5 to 11		Milton Keynes MK11 1PA
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01908 254535
Number on roll	7	Fax number	01908 254540
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Ms Cathy Baker
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable	Headteacher	Ms Cathy Baker

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

The pupil referral unit is part of the Milton Keynes Behaviour Support Service. The unit supports pupils who are at risk of exclusion from school as a result of their social, emotional or behavioural difficulties, are undergoing assessment for a statement of special educational needs or awaiting a vacancy in a suitable school. Currently, five of the pupils are dual registered¹, and two are attending the unit full time while they await other placements. Most pupils are of White British heritage and come from socially disadvantaged backgrounds.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this unit requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than in all circumstances it could be reasonably expected to perform. The unit is therefore given a Notice to Improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to the leadership and management of the unit. Although the unit's overall effectiveness and the value for money it provides are inadequate, it provides an acceptable standard of education.

The local authority conducted a detailed review of the unit's work in March 2006 and reached conclusions very similar to the findings of this inspection. The roles and responsibilities of leaders and managers are unclear, and there are no systems in place within the unit for checking the quality of its work. There has been a lack of strategic direction from the local authority and insufficient clarity about the purpose of the unit. The critical nature of the local authority's own review has led to some very recent improvements which indicate that the unit has a satisfactory capacity to improve.

Despite the weaknesses in leadership and management, pupils' achievement is satisfactory because the teachers and teaching assistants work well together as a committed and motivated team. Teaching is satisfactory overall, and it is good in literacy and numeracy. The satisfactory progress pupils make in their personal development, with good progress in their social and emotional development, prepares them effectively for reintegration into mainstream and special schools. Pupils' behavioural needs are assessed thoroughly. However, systems for assessing their academic needs, for setting learning targets and tracking their progress are inadequate.

What the school should do to improve further

- Clarify roles and responsibilities of leaders and managers so that staff are fully supported and developments are underpinned by a clear structure.
- Develop systems of self-evaluation and monitoring within the unit and strengthen improvement planning.
- Improve the assessment of pupils' academic progress, the system for collecting information about pupils' prior attainment from mainstream schools, the diagnosis of individual learning needs, academic target setting in individual education plans and the analysis of data.
- Clarify the role and purpose of the unit, including the placement of pupils.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Standards are below average as a result of the emotional and behavioural difficulties pupils have had in mainstream school. Strengths within the teaching and a curriculum that is reasonably well matched to pupils' needs mean that they achieve satisfactorily

during their time at the unit. However, the fact that they do not work towards academic targets makes it impossible to measure the exact progress of individual pupils.

Pupils make good progress in speaking and listening, and benefit a great deal from the many opportunities they have to talk to the staff, to ask questions in lessons and to express their ideas. They make satisfactory progress in reading and mathematics but their progress is more variable in writing. Pupils often join the unit with particular weaknesses in writing, especially in handwriting and letter formation, and some need more intensive support in this area. Pupils make satisfactory progress in information and communication technology (ICT), and they build on their existing knowledge in other subjects, such as science and humanities.

The emphasis placed on preparing pupils for return to school, through improving their behaviour and raising their self-esteem, means that the unit meets with a good level of success in reintegrating most pupils full time into mainstream and special schools, although some spend too long in the unit.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Pupils' personal development is satisfactory. Pupils form good relationships with the staff and new pupils quickly develop a sense of trust. They are learning to relate positively to one another. For instance, other pupils showed kindness and thoughtfulness towards a new pupil at snack time, making sure he felt included. Records show that incidents of inappropriate behaviour occur from time to time, but behaviour is satisfactory overall. Pupils have satisfactory attitudes, attend the unit regularly and clearly enjoy many of the activities provided. They make good progress in their emotional and social development, which receives particular emphasis, and satisfactory progress in their spiritual, moral and cultural development. Pupils are developing a good knowledge of how to stay healthy and a satisfactory awareness of how to stay safe. There is no formal system for pupils contributing their ideas to the unit's development although they are encouraged to take some responsibility for assessing improvements in their behaviour. They make satisfactory progress in acquiring the basic skills and personal qualities needed to ensure their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Despite the weaknesses in leadership and management, teaching is satisfactory overall and often good because the teachers and teaching assistants show real commitment and work well as a team. Teachers have good subject knowledge, especially in literacy and numeracy, and provide pupils with varied learning experiences that ensure lessons are tightly structured to sustain their interest. At times, the mixed-age class (currently ranging from Year 1 to Year 5) means that older or higher attaining pupils are not

challenged as much as they should be, but lessons are generally well planned, with different tasks for different pupils within a given topic. Staff manage pupils' behaviour satisfactorily, readily praising and encouraging them to apply themselves and earn stars. Attractive and stimulating displays have created a positive learning environment. Daily communication between the unit and parents is well established via the home-school diary, and parents are given opportunities to attend workshops.

The unit has recently begun to compile records that should enable managers to track and analyse the progress made by individual pupils. Staff receive useful information from mainstream schools about pupils' behavioural difficulties, and devise appropriately specific individual education plan targets that focus on behaviour and on improving pupils' readiness for school. They continually review these targets and involve pupils in judging for themselves how well they are doing. However, the unit receives limited information from schools about pupils' prior attainment. Staff intend to visit pupils in school before they join the unit to collect more information about what they can already do, but this practice is not yet in place. Although teachers check some aspects of pupils' literacy and numeracy skills when they join the unit, assessing pupils' academic attainment and using the resulting information is inadequate. There is no established system for identifying pupils' individual learning needs, and individual education plans do not include learning targets.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory, informed appropriately by the National Curriculum, with an emphasis on literacy and numeracy and personal, social and health education. Satisfactory opportunities are provided for pupils to use computers to support their learning, and to engage in creative and practical activities. The topic-based approach links subjects imaginatively and adds breadth to the learning experiences provided. Detailed planning is not fully in place for all subjects, but the teacher-in-charge has worked effectively with advisers from the local authority to improve planning in literacy and numeracy.

A number of different activities enrich pupils' learning. For instance, pupils have been on some educational visits, grew vegetables in the courtyard, took part in a healthy eating day, and had opportunities to develop their team skills when local sportsmen came in to provide coaching in football and basketball. The unit pays good attention to promoting pupils' physical and emotional health. It has gained the Healthy Schools Bronze Award and is now working towards the Silver Award.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The unit provides satisfactory care, guidance and support for its pupils. There have been recent improvements in this area in response to the local authority's audit, which raised concerns about the way pupils' safety was ensured. Appropriate child protection and anti-bullying policies are now in place and some training has been provided for staff, with more planned, so that they are better able to ensure that pupils are safe

and protected. The unit has satisfactory procedures for dealing with and recording inappropriate behaviour, and the system of rewards is motivating to pupils. All the pupils in the unit have come via the Behaviour Support Team, have a pastoral support plan and a key worker, and the unit works effectively with other agencies in its support of pupils. The high staff to pupil ratio means that pupils receive a great deal of individual attention and a parent noted how the staff have been 'very helpful and understanding' of her child's needs. However, the absence of individual learning targets means that academic guidance is not focused enough despite the ready support that is provided by skilled teaching assistants. Pupils are well supported when they reintegrate into mainstream and special schools at the end of their placement at the unit.

Leadership and management

Grade: 4

Leadership and management are inadequate and require significant improvement. Considering the unit has been open for three years, a number of systems are surprisingly undeveloped. Action has been taken only very recently to ensure that statutory requirements are met in relation to pupils' protection and well-being, and some other policies are still being developed.

The teaching assistants have clearly defined specialist roles, which contribute to their effectiveness, but the roles and responsibilities of the headteacher and the teacher-in-charge are unclear. Furthermore, a number of changes of key staff within the local authority has resulted in insufficient strategic development and a lack of clarity about the unit's purpose, including systems for the placement of pupils. At times, pupils join the unit with no clear plan for what will happen to them next and occasionally stay at the unit longer than they should. In the last two years, four different local authority officers have had responsibility for the unit and it has moved premises three times since it opened. The management committee, with new members recently appointed, is not yet as effective as it should be.

Since the unit opened, there has been high staff turnover and long-term sickness amongst staff. Significant difficulties in recruiting a second teacher have had an adverse effect on the day-to-day management of the unit, although the local authority is in the process of appointing another teacher for September 2006. These difficulties mean that the teacher-in-charge, as the only full-time teacher, has had insufficient time to develop systems and policies, and too few opportunities to undertake necessary training to develop her leadership skills.

Self-evaluation within the unit is wholly inadequate. Too much responsibility is left to the goodwill and motivation of the teacher-in-charge, and the temporary teachers and teaching assistants, to determine the quality of education. Teaching is satisfactory overall and often good only because they work together well as a committed team. Neither a comprehensive plan for improving the unit, nor systems for taking into account the views of parents, pupils and other stakeholders, are in place.

The local authority conducted a thorough review of the unit in March 2006, which raised serious concerns and came to conclusions similar to those reached by this inspection. This has been a very positive and necessary development that has already begun to bring about improvement. There is an emerging strategic vision for the unit, including its planned relocation to a school site. This has the potential to remedy existing weaknesses within leadership and management, and the increased focus on the unit following the local authority's review means that the unit has a satisfactory capacity to improve.

The unit is satisfactorily resourced and, whilst not ideal, the accommodation is used well and meets the needs of the current pupils adequately.

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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?	4	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	4	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	NA	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	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?	3	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	NA
The behaviour of learners	3	NA
The attendance of learners	2	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	3	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3	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?	3	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?	4	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	4	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	4	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	4	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	4	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

Pupils

Thank you for making me feel welcome when I came to visit The Base. I am writing to tell you what I thought about what I saw.

You are making satisfactory progress and you make good progress in speaking and listening because you have so many opportunities to talk to the staff. Your teachers and teaching assistants work well together and do all they can to help you. As a result of their hard work, the unit provides an acceptable education. The staff think really carefully about your behaviour and how it can be improved, although they need to pay more attention to how you could improve your work. I was pleased to see how well you get on with the adults who support you and how you are learning to be kind to one another. The good progress you make in your social and emotional development is bringing you closer to being able to attend school full time.

Unfortunately, I also found that there are some important weaknesses in the way the unit is led and managed, and these weaknesses mean that the unit is not as effective as it should be. I have asked the local authority and the headteacher to improve the way the unit is managed, so that it becomes as good as it could be.

Yours faithfully

M J Goodchild

Lead Inspector