



Taunton Tuition Base

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 134699
LEA Somerset
Inspection number 282651
Inspection dates 24 November 2005 to 24 November 2005
Reporting inspector Alan Dobbins RISP

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

Type of school	Special	School address	Congregational Church Offices
School category	Pupil referral unit		North Street
Age range of pupils	5 to 16		Taunton, Somerset TA1 1LW
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01823 283798
Number on roll	41	Fax number	01823 283798
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable	Headteacher	Ms Tracy Casson

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
5 to 16	24 November 2005 - 24 November 2005	282651

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one additional inspector.

Description of the school

This pupil referral unit, formed in January 2004, caters for pupils with medical conditions that prohibit them from attending school and a small number of permanently excluded pupils who are 'waiting' to return to mainstream schools or be placed in alternative provision. One pupil has a statement of special educational need. All of the 20 boys and 21 girls on roll receive at least five hours of tuition each week, mostly in their homes. A small number supplement this by attending small group sessions in the nearby Wellington centre or at the Taunton centre. Four pupils have an additional five hours of tuition each week presented in their own homes through the virtual classroom programme. They use laptops provided by the base to take part in lessons presented in an interactive format that allows them to communicate with each other through their screens and by voice. Class sizes vary, but can be up to seven pupils. The base has a remit for delivering tuition, via the virtual classroom, throughout Somerset. Eighteen pupils, on the roll of other equivalent units in the county, gain five hours tuition in their homes by joining in lessons with base pupils. This is the base's first inspection.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Taunton Tuition Base is a satisfactory and improving pupil referral unit that provides satisfactory value for money. The base's views of itself are in line with the inspector's findings. The head of base has made a good start. Parents report that the effective work of the home teachers, and the innovative use of the virtual classroom, allow some of their children to regain a zest for learning, and to continue to grow as young people, while overcoming their medical problems. Pupils are cared for well and are given good guidance. Teaching and the curriculum are satisfactory for most pupils, but are better for those whose mainstream teachers maintain close links with the base's teachers. The base keeps detailed records on pupils' progress, but makes too little use of this information in judging how good its work is. Subject leaders are not yet effective enough in developing their subjects. The management committee does not keep a careful enough watch to ensure that the centre is a suitable place of learning for all those who are admitted. The Taunton accommodation is not a satisfactory place in which to teach pupils. The capacity for further improvement is good.

What the school should do to improve further

- admit only those pupils whose learning and additional needs can be met by the base
- establish good working links with all the client schools
- have subject leaders take more responsibility for leading, managing and developing their subjects
- continue to develop the procedures for evaluating the effectiveness of the base
- ensure the Taunton accommodation is fit for purpose.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Overall, pupils make satisfactory progress. However, this varies for individual pupils from satisfactory to outstanding depending on three factors. Firstly, when the effect of their medical conditions on their ability to apply themselves to their learning is minimal, they make good progress. When it has a greater effect, progress is much reduced. Secondly, being taught in the virtual classroom adds an additional five hours of tuition. This, and the positive effect of taking virtual lessons, help most of these pupils make good progress and a small number outstanding progress. Thirdly, progress is better when teachers at the pupils' mainstream schools maintain their link with the pupils by overseeing the topics they are taught and by helping assess completed work.

Last year, 11 out of 16 pupils in Year 11 were entered for the GCSE examination. Five gained five A* to C passes and six gained five A* to G passes. These figures are below the equivalent figures for secondary schools in Somerset, but given pupils' medical backgrounds and the way in which their schooling has been disrupted they represent satisfactory progress. Last year, three of the five pupils in Years 7 to 9 who were taught in the virtual classroom improved their reading ages by one reading year over a six week period. The situation was much the same for mathematics, where the average

gain was equivalent to one National Curriculum level. For these pupils this represents good progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils make good progress in developing their personal and social skills. There are few opportunities to develop spiritual or cultural awareness. However, parents report that the home teachers, and those who teach in the virtual classroom, are 'brilliant' at establishing meaningful relationships with their children, which they use very well in improving their self-esteem and self-confidence. Pupils agree. Most say that they feel better about themselves because they know they are learning again and they like the thought that this will help them return to their mainstream schools or to enrol on a college course. The virtual classroom is an important social outlet for pupils. In virtual lessons, pupils chat with each other and help and encourage each other when they find topics difficult. Some have established real friendships after first being introduced in these lessons.

When they are medically and socially ready, as a first step to returning to mainstream provision, pupils are invited to the Taunton or the Wellington centres to take additional lessons and to socialise with other pupils and their teachers. Only a few pupils are visiting the centres at this time. Early indications are that they see these visits as important in helping prepare them for their return.

A pupil is registered as present when an arranged lesson, either at home, in the virtual classroom or at one of the two bases, is presented in full. Sometimes teachers will visit the home and the pupil will not take a lesson because of tiredness or some complication caused by their medical condition. When this happens they are marked as absent. Against these criteria, attendance is satisfactory.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching is satisfactory, overall. When the home teachers are guided by those in pupils' mainstream schools, planning is closely linked to National Curriculum topics and lesson tasks are relevant to pupils' needs and capabilities. In these lessons, teaching and learning are good. When teachers do not have good links with the mainstream teachers, they have too little knowledge of pupils' capabilities and what they have learned, and therefore sometimes teach topics pupils have previously covered. In other lessons, when the tasks are too difficult for pupils, no new learning takes place.

Teachers in the virtual classroom are quickly acquiring the necessary skills in presenting information and tasks through computer screens and communicating with pupils through speakers. Pupils too are also gaining the skills of learning in the virtual lessons. When both are done well as is the case in some lessons, teaching and learning are

outstanding. Then, pupils are often motivated enough to find out more about the topic by searching the internet after the finish of the lesson.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is satisfactory, but there are strong features including the innovative methods of communicating with pupils to meet their needs. The minimum aim of providing five hours of tuition each week to maintain learning in English, mathematics, science, and information and communication technology is met for about two thirds of pupils with the others gaining five more hours of tuition each week by taking virtual lessons in the same subjects. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 are prepared to take either the full GCSE or entry level examinations. Teachers ensure as best as possible that those who were studying other subjects, such as geography and history, for examination prior to joining the base, will continue to study these subjects. Learners' needs are met better when the curricular links with their mainstream schools are good. But for many pupils these links are not strong enough. A programme of special enrichment days to which all are invited is a good idea, but as yet it is too early to judge the success of this venture.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support for pupils are good. Child protection requirements and safety procedures are firmly established and understood by staff and pupils. Parents of pupils in the virtual classroom agree a policy for internet use that prohibits their children from visiting inappropriate web-sites. The web records are regularly checked.

Every six weeks the progress of each pupil is reviewed and meetings are called as appropriate. These meetings can include medical and mental health specialists, the educational psychologist, social service personnel, those from education welfare service and parents and teachers. They are effective for many reasons, but for the teachers they are important because they gain insight into their pupils' physical and mental health and they are able to adjust their teaching accordingly.

Those in Years 10 and 11, depending on their medical condition, benefit from work experience and the additional opportunities to socialise with others. Connexions advisers meet with every pupil in Year 9 and beyond and provide valued help in placing Year 11 pupils into suitable training programmes and onto courses in the local colleges.

Some pupils permanently excluded from their schools have been 'given' to the base. They are taught at home. This is inappropriate. They are only at the base because no places are available for them in specialist provision that deals with excluded pupils. Their learning and other needs are not being met.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The head of the centre has made a good start and has been well supported by the tuition manager and access manager. Her capacity for continuing to improve the quality and range of the provision is good. There is an accurate recognition of the need to continue to develop procedures to check how well the base is doing in order to improve further, as these are still early days. The management structure could be strengthened by subject teachers taking greater responsibility in leading, managing and evaluating work in their subjects and building up more effective links with mainstream schools.

The management committee is new and has met only once. At this time, the committee is finding its feet and needs to become more established in its role. For example, the committee is not protecting the quality of the provision sufficiently well because some pupils are being admitted, when it is clear that their learning and additional needs cannot be met.

The present location of the main centre is in the administrative section of a church. This is satisfactory for teaching virtual lessons and as a location for the home teachers. It is not an appropriate place to bring pupils to as a first step to reintegrating them into mainstream settings.

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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?	3	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	NA	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	3	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	3	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?	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?	3	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	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	3	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

Dear Pupils

I very much enjoyed visiting Taunton Tuition Base and would like to tell you what I think about it.

- because of the work of the base, many of you gain pass grades on the GCSE and entry level examinations that would otherwise not be possible
- the head of base has made a good start
- the virtual classroom is an excellent idea and some of you who are taking virtual lessons are doing very well
- the good relationships you have with your home teachers, and the virtual classroom teachers, help you become more confident and more self-assured
- you gain good guidance on your learning and on other matters, including on what you might do after you leave the base.

I would like a few things to be done better.

- the committee that helps manage the base needs to help the head of base more
- the procedures for checking how good the centre is need to be more thorough
- the Taunton building is not a satisfactory place for you to take lessons
- the teachers in charge of the subjects need to take a more active part in developing them
- the needs of those of you who have been excluded from schools are not being met.

With best wishes

Dr Alan Dobbins Lead inspector