

Project 16

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	100391
Local Authority	Islington
Inspection number	298952
Inspection dates	20–21 March 2007
Reporting inspector	Robin Hammerton HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005; it was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Pupil referral unit
School category	Pupil referral unit
Age range of pupils	14–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	34
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Headteacher	Mr Patrick Eames
Date of previous school inspection	23 January 2006
School address	White Lion Centre White Lion Street Islington London N1 9PW
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Age group	14–16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Project 16 provides education for pupils at Key Stage 4 with complex needs who have found it difficult to attend, or who have been permanently excluded from, mainstream schools. They come from a range of socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds within the borough of Islington. Nearly three-quarters of the students are male; all are on the special needs register with about a quarter having a statement of special educational need. A small group of students comes from backgrounds where English is spoken as an additional language. At its inspection in October 2004, the unit was deemed to have serious weaknesses. Since January 2006, it has required special measures. A new headteacher began work in November 2006. The acting deputy headteacher has accepted the permanent role.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that Project 16 no longer requires special measures. The unit has improved significantly since its previous inspection and particularly rapidly in the last four months. The headteacher accurately describes this using a nautical metaphor: 'We've had to stabilise a sinking ship. Now we're floating, stable and sailing in the right direction.' Project 16's recent revival is a real success story. It now provides a satisfactory education with several good elements. The students achieve satisfactorily in a wide variety of courses. Standards, although very low when compared with national benchmarks for all schools, are rising. Students' personal development and well-being are good. While in the unit, they become much more mature and reflective young people who understand the benefit of education and want to succeed. Behaviour is good.

The unit now has a more definite strategic role within the local authority (LA). It is developing strong links with partners, including Islington secondary schools, the police, health and social services and local providers of courses and activities. These links help the students' good personal development significantly and support the substantial recent improvements in the curriculum which is now much more relevant and exciting. As a result of this, and the good care and personal support they receive, students want to come to the unit. Attendance has improved dramatically and is now good. Teaching and learning are satisfactory with good aspects. However, support staff are not always used to best effect. They often provide general supervision of students with an insufficiently proactive role in promoting learning.

The impetus for the recent improvements has come from the impressive vision and energy of the headteacher, very ably supported by the acting deputy. Because the changes are welcomed by staff and students, whose views are heard clearly, they are already becoming well-established. Overall leadership and management are satisfactory. Management systems in the unit are satisfactory and gradually improving. However, they are not secure enough to sustain the significant further improvement which the unit still wants to achieve. Current capacity to improve is, therefore, satisfactory rather than good. The improvement plan is clearly written, but does not include all recent developments or have sharp enough success criteria. The unit judges itself accurately but its self-evaluation says too much about actions taken rather than their impact on students' learning. Students' progress towards GCSE qualifications is checked carefully but their progress in other courses is not as clearly tracked. Although recent staff development has been significant, performance management arrangements to underpin this are not sufficiently developed.

For the first time, the unit has its own budget, rather than its running costs being subsumed within general LA accounts. This makes it possible for the unit to demonstrate clearly that it provides satisfactory value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

* Improve performance management arrangements for all staff, and ensure that support staff are clear about how their work should be focused on improving students' learning. * Make sure the unit's improvement plan includes all the key developments actually being undertaken and is clearer about how success is measured. * Relate unit self-evaluation more closely to outcomes for students and gather better evidence about students' personal development and their vocational learning.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Students enter Project 16 with low attainment, having often missed much of their previous education. Standards in the unit remain significantly below average but, because of the improved curriculum, attendance and behaviour, students' achievement is now satisfactory. In 2006, almost two thirds of Year 11 students gained at least one GCSE pass and a few reached higher grades. Present students are on track to do better than this in 2007. Many are also working towards entry level qualifications in recently introduced and inspiring vocational courses at off-site venues. For several, this represents considerable success and backs up their claim that, 'We've learned more here than in mainstream.' However, the unit's tracking of students' achievement in these courses is not collated clearly enough to show accurately how much progress each student is making. Although overall achievement is clearly satisfactory, better evidence would be needed to show that it is good.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students' personal development and well-being are good, especially in view of the severe difficulties that many have experienced. Their much better attendance and punctuality shows that they really enjoy and appreciate the wide range of opportunities now available. These are huge changes. Some students still display challenging behaviour at times, but are beginning to control their emotions successfully. The number of fixed term exclusions has fallen dramatically over the past year. Students show concern for each other's safety and work together well, both within the unit and outside. For example, during water-based activities at the Islington boat club, students' mutual support and understanding of safety procedures are exemplary. Different ethnic groups mix well and respect each other's traditions. Relationships between adults and students are also good. Students say, 'Teachers speak to you like they're on your level. There's no shouting or laughing at you.' Students are willing to take responsibility and staff are beginning to provide more opportunities for them to do so. They develop the self-confidence to state their views about how the unit can be improved during weekly after-school meetings of the student forum. This has resulted in some recent developments, including easier access to lunches in the adjacent youth centre and extra lunchtime sports activities, contributing to a healthier lifestyle. These are all signs of students' good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall and consistently good in English and mathematics. Across the unit, lessons are carefully structured and well-paced. Students know how each lesson or activity is designed to benefit them. Good behaviour is promoted through the sensitive relationships between adults and students, who enjoy the opportunity to learn in small classes or groups with significant individual attention. Those for whom English is an additional language receive suitably focused support.

Students are given individual targets to work towards in lessons but these are usually about behavioural issues, rather than the subject. Work is not always matched well enough to individual

needs, which hinders progress. Opportunities to develop the students' understanding through careful questioning are sometimes missed, with teachers not always allowing students to contribute enough in discussions, or evaluate sufficiently how well they have learned. Support staff are present in almost all lessons. These staff provide supervision, helping students to stay focused, but do not play an active enough role in learning. This is due to the lack of individual targets and because they are not clear enough about how to promote learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The unit is developing a very good, motivating curriculum. This is inclusive, taking close account of all students' individual needs, and is the most significant reason for the rises in levels of attendance and punctuality. English, mathematics, information and communications technology (ICT), art, food technology, sport, humanities and personal, social and health education (PSHE) are included in a common core for all students. Ten GCSE options are now available. Daily tutorial sessions enable students to discuss issues of importance to them and develop literacy skills through an improved programme. Students can also make choices with staff making sterling efforts to provide whatever subjects individuals wish to study, as long as they have a good reason. For example, individual lessons are currently made available, using external providers, in French and mechanics. Staff are often able to get learning in a variety of areas accredited and each student now has a personalised programme of awards and qualifications to aim for.

The unit makes very good regular use of outside organisations, such as the Islington Boat Club and Arsenal FC, to provide exciting activities through which students gain worthwhile vocational qualifications. Students also develop their personal and social skills well through these programmes. However, occasionally some important core lessons are missed because of other activities taking precedence. A range of extra-curricular activities is being developed, with students contributing their ideas and suggestions.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Strong links with agencies help provide good support for students. For example, many students take advantage of easy access to support from the child and adolescent mental health service (CAMHS) and educational psychology service. Islington police provide a regular positive and friendly presence. The Connexions service is based in the building, providing highly valued advice and practical support concerning students' future employment, education and training. Liaison between unit staff and all these services is strong, providing a very 'joined-up' approach in the spirit of Every Child Matters. Child protection and safeguarding procedures, for these often vulnerable young people, are thorough.

Clear targets for improving behaviour are frequently reviewed, leading to appropriate, motivating rewards. A learning mentor works productively with those who need further support to improve their attendance and punctuality. However, students need more guidance to help them understand how to improve their work as teachers do not place enough emphasis on academic targets. Students know their subject target grades but are unsure about what they need to do to reach them.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher provides very strong, knowledgeable and intuitive leadership, with clear moral purpose. He enthuses and engages staff and students, gaining their strong respect. He understands well the wide-ranging needs of the students, going out of his way to meet them imaginatively. The students much appreciate this. He is also strongly committed to the development and welfare of staff which has led to much more stable staffing. Morale is high. The positive and trusting climate this has created leads directly to the significant improvements in the unit.

The headteacher is supported very well by his deputy, who has a great deal of relevant experience to contribute. Together, they communicate a clear vision for Project 16 which they want to become outstanding in the foreseeable future. This leads to an exceptionally strong sense of direction and purpose shared by all staff. Some more long-standing staff are beginning to develop useful responsibilities, and training is well received. The LA is also clearer about how the unit will contribute to overall borough provision in the future.

Day-to-day, the unit runs well. Students and staff understand routines and expectations of behaviour which is a great improvement. However, more broadly, although management systems have improved somewhat, they are not strong enough to support the improvements needed for the unit to become outstanding. For example, the quality of teaching and learning is monitored through a reasonably regular programme of lesson observation supported by coaching from LA staff. This has brought some improvements but the lack of formal performance management systems, and a structured programme of development of teaching, hampers progress. Improvement planning and self-evaluation systems are not well enough refined, or sufficiently comprehensive or sophisticated, to be fully effective. Although the unit is gaining greater control over its budget, links between this and improvement priorities are not clearly identified. Each student is well known to staff, but progress in their personal development and vocational learning is not tracked closely enough.

Governance is provided principally by the LA's Project Group. This provides useful support and accountability. However, governance systems are still under review by the LA for all its pupil referral units, and, at present, do not involve lay people and the local community sufficiently.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall
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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
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

I have enjoyed getting to know you on the visits I have made to Project 16 during the time it has been in special measures. Thank you for always being friendly, helpful and honest. And I must give a particular thank you to the one of you whose name I know (but sadly I can't put it in this letter) who took me safely for a motor boat ride around the canal basin at the boat club. Well done - you did a great job!

When I came to visit recently with another inspector, Bill, we decided that the unit doesn't need special measures any more. This is great news for everyone; staff and students. You have all done really well to improve things so much in just a few months. Well done for coming to the unit much more regularly and for being on time. This is very important. Well done too for the hard work so many of you are doing to try to get some good qualifications at GCSE and in job-related subjects. It's good that the unit now provides such a good range of interesting courses and activities. You can all make choices and suggestions which then usually happen. Bill and I could tell how pleased you are about this. You say really good things about the way that Patrick, Marcus and all the staff look out for you. Rightly so. It's good to see how you all get on well together most of the time and look out for each other. You listen to each other well too. These are important skills you will certainly need in the future.

So Project 16 has improved a lot. There are, of course, some things that can be better still. We have suggested that new ideas and initiatives should be planned more clearly. Staff need to make sure they know how well these things are going and how much you are all getting out of new developments. They need to make sure that your personal development and progress in non-GCSE courses is checked more closely. Sometimes, staff need to be clearer about how they can help you learn, and give you targets about the subjects you do.

Finally, I'd like to say well done again to all of you and wish each one of you every success for the future at Project 16, and in what you do afterwards. And, if you go, enjoy Disneyland Paris! I wish I was coming with you.

Yours sincerely,

Robin Hammerton
Her Majesty's Inspector