



Access to Learning

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 131294
Local Authority Hartlepool
Inspection number 300779
Inspection dates 31 January –1 February 2007
Reporting inspector Eric Craven HMI

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

Type of school	Pupil referral unit	School address	Brierton Hill
School category	Pupil referral unit		Brierton Lane, Hartlepool
Age range of pupils	8–16		TS25 4BY
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01429 265637
Number on roll (school)	56	Fax number	01429 261356
Appropriate authority	The local authority	Headteacher	Mrs Val Burton
Date of previous school inspection	1 May 2003		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
8–16	31 January –1 February 2007	300779

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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

Access to Learning provides for pupils permanently excluded from mainstream schools and for 23 pupils who have been designated as having emotional, social and behaviour difficulties (ESBD), 20 of whom have a statement of special educational need. The unit serves the whole of the Hartlepool area. All but two of the pupils are boys and three are looked after children. Just over 40% are entitled to a free school meal, which is well above the national average. The unit manages a small home and hospital teaching service for pupils with medical problems. The unit is facing a period of change as the local authority is determining plans to reorganise its provision for the pupils with ESBD and those excluded from mainstream schools.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

The overall effectiveness of the unit, although improving, is inadequate. 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 the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The unit is therefore given a Notice to Improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to pupils' attendance and academic progress, the curriculum and the inappropriateness of ESD pupils being educated in a pupil referral unit.

Because the rate of attendance is poor and because not enough teaching is good or sufficiently challenging, standards are too low as is the pupils' rate of progress. Although satisfactory overall, teaching is too variable. There is a scarcity of exciting and high quality teaching resources such as interactive whiteboards and as a result pupils are not well motivated or sufficiently engaged in many lessons. Pupils' attitudes in lessons are often downbeat with many being casual in their learning and some being derisory to staff and peers. This is in part because teaching is too frequently uninspiring. In the better lessons work is appropriately matched to pupils' needs and interests and they see relevance in what they are asked to do. The behaviour management system operates effectively and most pupils get the message of how they are expected to behave. However, there are a few who buck the system and pose challenges to staff. Pupils' behaviour has improved and is satisfactory overall although a good proportion of the few parents who responded to the parents' questionnaire disagreed. The incidence of fixed term exclusions from the unit is reducing. Relationships between pupils and staff are good in most cases and staff show caring attitudes toward the pupils. Health and safety arrangements are sound. The curriculum does not satisfy the statements of special educational need of the pupils with ESD as a full national curriculum is not provided and this is unacceptable. Although the use of alternative curricular packages for older pupils is good the curriculum is generally not well matched to the pupils' needs and interests. The leadership and management of the unit have improved with the return of the headteacher from long term absence and the widening of the fairly new senior leadership team. They work purposefully as a close group and perform their roles satisfactorily. However, middle management is restricted simply because there are no subject co-ordinators. As a consequence the curriculum is not well managed. Although the unit has made considerable efforts to improve the situation few pupils return to mainstream schools and as a consequence some pupils spend far too long at the unit. From a very low base just over a year ago, when the local authority placed the unit in one of its categories of concern, the senior leadership team have worked hard to develop systems and the consistent application of these by staff. They have been largely successful. Never the less the impact of these systems is not fully evident as some of the team's evaluations are neither insufficiently robust nor focused on outcomes, for example data on pupils' behaviour is gathered but not analysed at a group or whole school level. Senior staff are aware of the unit's strengths and weaknesses and are working through a comprehensive action plan, which is effectively monitored. The unit has deliberately focused on improving the behaviour of the pupils so that staff can concentrate more on teaching. It is making progress in this respect

but has not yet reached a threshold where it is providing an acceptable education for the pupils. However, because of the progress made from a very low base the capacity for further improvement is satisfactory.

What the school should do to improve further

- Work closely with the local authority to ensure pupils with ESBD have their education in a school based environment where the full national curriculum is available.
- Improve attendance.
- Improve teaching so that more is of good quality.
- Improve the standards and rate of progress made by pupils.
- Improve the curriculum and management of curriculum subjects.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Many of the pupils arrive at the unit with standards below those expected for their ages. This is most often because of their chequered educational histories and in some cases because of additional learning difficulties. However, there are other pupils whose standards are in-line with what is expected. The progress made by pupils in their personal and social developments has accelerated and is satisfactory. It is better than their academic progress. The poor attendance of some pupils contributes to this limited progress but an inadequate curriculum and not enough good teaching are also hindrances.

Many students do achieve external accreditation in Key Stage 4 but there are students whose capabilities show they could achieve more. The unit's own records demonstrate that there is insufficient progress being made by pupils generally in their reading. Pupils' recording and presentation of work seen in many lessons is also weak.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Personal development is satisfactory. Pupils are aware of how they should behave because of the clear guidance they receive. Many are re-engaging with learning well as their self-esteem and behaviour improves. However, some still struggle to behave appropriately at times and this appears as a lack of tolerance or respect for their peers. Staff support pupils well to face up to these difficulties and consequently they are learning to take increasing responsibility for managing their own emotions and behaviour. Pupils spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is also satisfactory, encouraged by these secure relationships with staff. Pupils said they feel safe in the unit. These pupils feel the unit has helped them gain in confidence as they are involved in fewer confrontations. Even so, some older pupils feel frustrated because the range of subjects and external accreditation available to them is too limited. Pupils' awareness of the importance of regular exercise and healthy eating and the need to develop

cooperative work skills for later life are improving through opportunities to participate in outdoor physical activity, food technology lessons and personal, social and health education programmes. However contributions they make to the community are limited.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching is satisfactory although it is variable and ranges from good to inadequate. Not enough of it is good. Planning has improved and helpfully guides teachers and teaching assistants. In the better lessons teaching is enthused and vibrant and the work is made relevant to the pupils. In the weaker ones the conditions for learning are not well established and pupils talk over the teacher and at times pay scant attention to what they have to do. Teacher talk dominates for too long and as a consequence pupils become agitated and bored. Pupils' learning is generally compliant but unenthused and a reliance on paper exercises and worksheets and lack of high quality resources are barriers to more interesting lessons being delivered.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 4

The curriculum is inadequately matched to the needs, interests and aspirations of a significant minority of pupils. This is partly because the unit is not currently able to arrange a speedy or successful return to a mainstream setting for many of them. In particular it is not able to provide those pupils with statements of special educational needs (SEN) their entitlement to the full range of appropriately resourced national curriculum subjects. Consequently, and despite an appropriate focus on basic skills, the curriculum fails to fully capture the imagination or stimulate the progress and personal development of many pupils. In contrast the unit has successfully used alternative external providers, such as the Hart Project, to create individual learning packages for pupils that are well matched to their individual needs to help them leave with appropriate skills and some accreditation.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The care and support given to pupils is satisfactory. Staff treat pupils with courtesy and respect and act as good role models. They strive to establish and maintain good relationships with pupils, regardless of abrasive behaviour and gradually pupils learn to reflect on the impact their behaviour can have on others. The unit makes particularly effective use of external services to give pupils advice about healthy lifestyles and race relations. Connexions personnel also provide useful guidance about local work and training opportunities. Child protection and risk assessment procedures are in place and staff are aware of their responsibilities. The unit works closely with the education welfare service who together work hard to improve instances of poor

attendance. Consequently attendance has improved but remains unsatisfactory with limited effect on persistent non-attenders. Assessment data from previous schools is not always available so new arrivals are assessed upon entry to establish their academic levels. Arrangements to monitor pupils' subsequent academic progress have only recently been introduced and teachers currently lack accurate information to help them determine how well pupils can or should achieve. Assessment and review arrangements for pupils with statements of SEN are satisfactory but the pupils' individual education plans do not always specify targets that are capable of showing the progress made.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The senior leaders have gone a long way in recovering the unit from the significant deficiencies it had when it became a concern to the local authority just over a year ago. The unit is generally running smoothly because of the helpful systems introduced. The behaviour management procedures are a good example of this. However a focus on pupils' academic achievement has lagged behind the work done to improve their personal and social development and as a result, standards are too low and the rate of progress too slow. Senior leaders have demonstrated the capacity to monitor and evaluate some of the unit's work. Lesson observations are regularly undertaken and performance management arrangements are established. However the use of pupil progress and behaviour data at a whole school level is weak and some evaluations don't sufficiently focus on outcomes. The home and hospital teaching service operates effectively and the service's own monitoring of parents' views of the service show they are positive about it. The management committee benefits from membership of experienced staff from the local authority some of whom are in a good position to monitor the progress of the unit. It is aware of the unit's strengths and weaknesses and through the chair of the committee and another linked LA officer offer suitable support and challenge to the senior leaders.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	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?	4
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3
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	NA

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The behaviour of learners	3
The attendance of learners	4
How well learners enjoy their education	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	4
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?	4
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

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.

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	3
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	4
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
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?	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Access to Learning

Brierton Hill

Brierton Lane

Hartlepool

TS25 4BY

2 February 2007

Dear Pupils

Many thanks for the kind welcome you gave me and Mr Farrow when we visited Access to Learning this week. We are especially grateful to those pupils who met with Mr Farrow and gave their opinions and views about the school.

We can see that Access to Learning has improved over the last year or so and we are pleased about that. We are delighted that lots of you for most of the time are behaving well and we think the system you have to earn points has helped you to manage your behaviour much better. We know that attendance has got better and we put this down to the school using better systems to check why pupils are not in school and also because the school is a nicer place to learn. Never the less, the attendance of some pupils is not good enough and needs to improve. We think the quality of the teaching is okay but that more of it could be better especially if the teachers had more up to date equipment, like interactive whiteboards, to help them. Those pupils we spoke to told us that the school is safe and secure and that staff take health and safety seriously. There are some parts of the curriculum which are fine especially the links the school makes with other places such as the Hart Project. However, we don't think the curriculum is good enough yet as it doesn't fully help some of you achieve what you can. Those of you who have statements of special educational need should be having lessons in all of the subjects of the National Curriculum and at the moment you're not. The headteacher and the other senior members of staff have improved the school over the past year by making sure that the school runs smoothly and that the systems such as the points system work properly. However, there is more to do because we don't think the school is yet at the stage where you are getting the best education you can and are achieving as much as you can.

We have asked Mrs Burton, the staff and the local authority to make some improvements. These are to do with some pupils' attendance, making teaching better, helping you make more progress in your learning, organising and managing the subjects better and finally to make arrangements so that those of you who haven't been permanently excluded from other schools have your education in a school where all the subjects of the national curriculum are taught.

You have our best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely,

Eric Craven

Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools