

The Meriton Education and Support for Young Parents

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	108908
Local Authority	Bristol, City of
Inspection number	301995
Inspection date	25 June 2007
Reporting inspector	Patricia Potheary

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

Type of school	Pupil referral unit
School category	Pupil referral unit
Age range of pupils	13–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	31
6th form	25
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sue Cripps
Headteacher	Carol Bowery
Date of previous school inspection	13 May 2003
School address	Meriton Street St Philips Bristol BS2 0SZ
Telephone number	0117 9717428
Fax number	0117 9719765

Age group	13–19
Inspection date	25 June 2007
Inspection number	301995

© Crown copyright 2007

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

The Meriton Centre provides education and support for young mothers. The students come from backgrounds with high levels of deprivation, although the number with learning difficulties is very low. Those aged 13 to 16 attend full time and there is extended provision for those over 16, who attend for 12 hours per week. The centre runs an on-site nursery for the babies of the young mothers, which was inspected separately. A small minority are from Black British and minority ethnic groups. A small minority are looked after by the local authority. Roughly half of the students enter or leave the centre each school year.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

The Meriton Centre is outstanding in all major respects. It provides an educational haven for young mothers, most of whom have very poor records of attending mainstream schools. Students typically describe the centre as 'brilliant'. The centre enables them to aspire to a much better future for themselves and their babies. Standards on entry to the centre are low. Within an average of six to eight months and despite pregnancy and giving birth, standards are broadly average by the time students leave. An outstanding curriculum, with extensive links to other organisations, offers an exceptionally wide array of courses tailored to meet each student's needs and aptitudes. The focus is on securing their ability to have sustained employment in the future. This is highly motivating to the students, whose achievements over very short periods of time are excellent, and they all leave with good quality qualifications. Highly practical lessons with outstanding teaching and learning ensure that students make the maximum progress. The centre was found to be outstanding during the last inspection. Excellent leadership and management, with rigorous self-evaluation, have ensured that this high quality has been maintained and improved further.

Students' achievements include excellent personal development and well-being, where they develop enough confidence and maturity to make a significant contribution to their community. An impressive example is the work they undertake to educate other young people about the realities of young parenthood, which includes a video and giving talks to large audiences of adults. Students and their parents testify to the fact that the centre has transformed the lives of these young women, most of whom would not have taken qualifications in their mainstream schools. This has come about as a result of outstanding care, guidance and support, where every facet of the students' personal, social and academic needs are carefully and regularly mentored to help them achieve and to guide them towards their future. As a result, they show a keen awareness of how to keep safe and healthy and look after their babies well. This excellent guidance has also meant that, for example, in the last year six young women have qualified and are now employed as teaching assistants and several have recently attended university, two of whom are now employed in the nursery. When students' circumstances are considered, including for some, frequent changes of foster placement, these achievements are remarkable.

The centre is well placed to improve outcomes for a wider group of young mothers in Bristol in line with the government's teenage pregnancy strategy, although this has not yet been explored.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The post-16 provision is also outstanding. It differs from the pre-16 provision in that it is only available for 12 hours a week. This is because it is offered as extended provision, rather than as a formal sixth form. The circumstances and histories of the young mothers are very similar to those of the younger students and so is the provision offered. Some catch up on GCSE courses previously failed, and for others there is a strong focus on basic skills and vocational qualifications. In the short time that these students attend each week, they also make exceptional strides in their learning and personal development and go on to much brighter futures.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop the potential of the centre for improving outcomes for an even wider population of teenage mothers.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Students of all ages, including those over 16, enter the centre at all times during the year. A very large majority have had poor attendance records and many have refused to go to school. The standard of their work is therefore low. Within an average of six to eight months, regardless of ability or learning difficulty, they go on to achieve a wide range of qualifications including GCSEs, basic skills, AS levels and vocational courses. This means that their achievement and progress are outstanding. Achievement in English is particularly strong with most students reaching A-C grades in their GCSEs due to the excellent teaching in this subject.

The following individual stories are typical. Four students this year joined the centre in February and none of them had been entered for examinations. After five months and having had their babies in the meantime, they will leave with three or four GCSEs each, plus other qualifications, demonstrating excellent progress. One student, having changed foster placement just before the examinations, achieved five GCSEs in Year 10 with three Cs, a D and a double E in science, which is remarkable.

Looked-after students attending the centre have much higher achievements than is found nationally. The extensive curriculum means that students of all ages achieve their entry level in child development and post-16 students, among other things, achieve key skills qualifications in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology, which helps prepare them exceptionally well for the future. Students almost all go on to further education or employment, which was not their intention before joining the centre.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Students thoroughly enjoy being at the centre, typically saying that it is 'fantastic fun' and describing the respect that they are given as one key to their improved attitudes. One described how 'they make you feel special in your different ways'. Their attendance improves enormously once they begin to understand just how much they can achieve. They really like having their babies with them and learn a lot about looking after them. Several parents describe how the centre has transformed their daughters' lives and how, to quote one of them, they now 'see hope for the future'. Students' behaviour and mature, responsible attitudes are excellent. They contribute in many ways, enthusiastically describing their talk on a local radio station and how it has helped to change other people's views about teenage mothers. They look after each other, meeting up when the centre is closed. With very strong support from the centre, students show an excellent understanding of how to keep themselves and their babies safe in their often complex lives. They also know how to keep healthy, enjoying the many keep fit activities such as canoeing, bike riding and dance. They prepare healthy food at the centre, although a few still choose unhealthy snacks at times, despite the regular fruit available for them to eat. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding is very good. Through some excellent

provision, including plenty of trips to the theatre and exhibitions, their awareness of many issues is much improved.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Lessons at the centre are as practical as possible, which makes them very meaningful to students so that they progress really quickly. There is a relaxed atmosphere in all lessons, with plenty of enjoyment and strong motivation from the students to do well. Students are closely involved in their assessments and are quite clear about what they need to do to gain the grades that they are aiming for. This enables them to work well independently. Targets are set deliberately high and students are shown just how they can reach these aspirational goals. The strong quality of relationships gives students the courage to take risks with their learning. Every lesson is planned on an individual basis and numbers allow for plenty of individual support and attention, which is why the results are outstanding. Teachers also take great care to teach basic skills and incorporate personal development targets into all lessons, which supports the excellent progress students make in all areas.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The curriculum contributes significantly to students' excellent learning and motivation because it is tailored individually to each student's needs. Links with other organisations are exceptional and enable students to choose from an array of over 40 different courses, including those related to work, English, mathematics, science, ICT, healthy living, child development, the performing arts, media, law, design and technology, and health and safety. There is a strong focus on courses which will lead directly to enhanced work and future opportunities. Many of them are very relevant to the students as young mothers. Courses are offered at many different levels to match the different attainment of students so that they all progress from a starting point which suits them. The curriculum is very rich, ensuring that all aspects are firmly rooted in real and practical experiences and are thoroughly enjoyable. The Wizard of Meritonia production being organised by a local theatre group, for example, is planned to incorporate work on safe and healthy living as well as many issues of concern to the young women.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Systems to safeguard students are robust and all essential procedures are in place. Programmes to promote students' personal development, including mentoring, are extensive and very successful. They involve many different agencies such as housing, social services and health. Students demonstrate remarkable changes in their ability to take responsibility for themselves and their babies. One parent typically reported that 'The child I thought I had lost is returned.' Several young mothers are able to live independently. The information provided on what to do next is exceptional and leads to high quality placements and well linked courses when students

leave. In a very few cases, the host college is unable to provide the necessary support for these young mothers and they sometimes return to the centre. The centre is working to develop partnership schemes to promote better support for these students after they leave. The guidance to help students reach high standards is very detailed, involves parents and is extremely effective. When the very high expectations of what will be achieved are set and agreed, each student's progress is then closely monitored and support is always on hand to keep them on track.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Exceptional direction from the headteacher, very well supported by senior staff, has ensured that the centre goes from strength to strength. It seems 'no stone is left unturned' in seeking ways to help students grow academically and personally. Self-evaluation is outstanding; it is very thorough and involves all stakeholders including parents and students. This has led to some excellent improvements since the last inspection, for instance, in students' qualifications, achievements and attendance. The capacity to continue improving is very good.

The management committee has been through considerable reorganisation recently and it now has an increased and more effective role in the day-to-day work of the centre. Its members show strong skills in holding the centre to account for the progress students make. The centre has the capacity to undertake a wider role in the authority to improve outcomes for more young mothers and thus increase their life opportunities. This is not undertaken yet, but would be welcomed by the centre and management committee.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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	16-19
--	-----------------------	--------------

Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	1	1
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The behaviour of learners	1	
The attendance of learners	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

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?	1	1
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	1	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Dear Students

Inspection of The Meriton Centre, St Phillips, Bristol, BS2 0SZ

Thank you for being so welcoming to me when I visited your centre. I enjoyed meeting you very much, joining you for lunch and seeing some of the things you do. I found your centre to be very successful, and very well run and caring. It is an excellent place to learn, just as you told me it was. It helps all of you to make outstanding progress in your courses, in your social skills and in your ability to cope as young mothers. Your headteacher and senior staff do an excellent job in seeing that you all do so very well.

You clearly show mature and very responsible attitudes to your work and to other people. Your teachers and support staff show considerable skill in helping you to do your best and they teach you very well indeed. The enthusiasm you show for wanting to do well is plain for all to see, and you clearly enjoy coming to the centre. I think that this, alongside the very good qualifications you gain, will stand you in very good stead for your next placement and future lives.

It is pleasing to see that you attend regularly, take plenty of exercise and have such a keen interest in eating healthily, even though some of you do not always apply it! Your teachers see to it that you have an excellent range of subjects and activities to make learning enjoyable and to help you learn so much. The number of courses that you achieve, despite having your babies, is impressive. The centre is exceptional in keeping you safe and helping you to become well rounded and independent people. It also cares for and guides you very well to aim high. The excellent way you contribute to the school and the local community is also impressive, especially the confident way you help to spread an understanding of what it is to be a young mother. We have asked your teachers to consider supporting more young mothers in the community of Bristol, and maybe you can be of help in this.

I wish you all the very best in the future.

Yours sincerely Lead inspector