

Agincourt House

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	100006
Local Authority	Camden
Inspection number	307270
Inspection date	15 May 2008
Reporting inspector	Bill Stoneham

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	14–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	34
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ms Ronke Martins
Headteacher	Mrs Poppy Berry
Date of previous school inspection	10 May 2004
School address	Agincourt Road Camden London NW3 2NY
Telephone number	020 7974 8030
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Age group	14-16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Agincourt House is a mixed Key Stage 4 pupil referral unit providing education for youngsters aged 14 to 16. Most have been permanently excluded from their mainstream schools and have histories of disrupted education. Some live in areas that are characterised by drugs, violence and crime. The socio-economic context is frequently well below average. Almost all of the students will have experienced emotional, social and/or behavioural difficulties at some point in their lives. Most have educational difficulties or disabilities. There are similar numbers of boys and girls in attendance. The service covers the whole of the London Borough of Camden.

The vision of the centre is to personalise the curriculum to match the needs, abilities and aspirations of each student. Each student is treated as an individual and the service works with them to achieve their potential and tailor their programme accordingly. The service is not trying to reintegrate the students back to mainstream education; instead, it is endeavouring to equip the students with the necessary skills to progress to further education or to the world of work.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Agincourt House provides a good level of education for its students. There are some outstanding features of this provision, particularly in the care guidance and support offered to them. The centre works in partnership with a significant number of other bodies. This work is outstanding because of the range of opportunities and support that is offered and the contribution this makes to the education of the students, including the development of their social skills. The most inspirational aspect of the school's work is the outstanding leadership of the headteacher. Her dedication and commitment to improving the lives of the students is simply wonderful to see.

Students entering Agincourt House have usually had a disrupted education and their standards of work are at least below, and frequently well below average. By the time they leave, their attainment levels have risen. They remain below average, but most students gain some qualifications and there has been a year-on-year improvement in the centre's GCSE grades. Students can study GCSEs in a number of subjects and other relevant qualifications are available. The centre's monitoring and tracking records are detailed. These clearly show that those students who attend regularly make at least good progress. For some, their progress is outstanding. Some students, who were predicted to gain nothing in their mainstream school because of their attitudes and poor attendance, leave Agincourt House with a set of qualifications that equips them to progress successfully to the next stage in their lives. Much of this success stems from the outstanding care, guidance and support offered. A particularly impressive aspect is that each student's work and conduct is monitored and recorded in every lesson. Each student is set four personal targets relating to their work, conduct and behaviour. Staff are vigilant in recording progress against these four targets. Such monitoring enables the staff to intervene quickly, and at an early stage, if things are not going well; equally the information is used to offer praise and encouragement. There is a very good reward system in place. Supporting this excellent programme is a plethora of other measures to track progress and offer support and encouragement. Very good work is done in association with the careers provider, to help the students to progress to the next stage of their education, or to enter the world of work, and centre staff offer high quality support and guidance on career choices. The levels of monitoring are detailed and thorough and directly contribute to the improvement in standards and the excellent progress made by some students.

Good progress is also due to good teaching and a good curriculum. Much good, and some outstanding, teaching and learning was seen during the inspection. Teachers are confident and knowledgeable. In lessons, the set tasks challenge and extend the students. Some staff have an occasional tendency to tell the students answers too quickly and there are occasions where opportunities to develop the students' literacy skills are missed. Overall, however, teaching staff have high expectations of the students and this aids their learning. This was particularly so in an outstanding art lesson where students were challenged to use adjectives to describe a person's mood and then reflect their description using colour. This was challenging and thought provoking and developed literacy skills as well as encouraging analysis and evaluation. The good curriculum offers a nice balance between academic study, vocational work and extra curricular activity, such as sport. The centre has improved its provision for science, something that was criticised in the last inspection report, and there are good plans to improve further the already good provision for vocational education. Some students do not have English as their first language. The staff encourage French speakers, for example, to enter for French

GCSE, but this policy is not extended consistently to native speakers of other languages. This is an area of the curriculum that can be improved. In all other respects, the curriculum meets the needs of the students well and enables progress to further education or the world of work.

Personal development and well-being are good. The centre is continually seeking ways of encouraging the students to become more involved and to take responsibility for their own actions and their immediate environment. Good provision is made for the students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Good moral and social development is reflected in the good behaviour seen during the visit and in the good relationships existing between staff and students. Some good spiritual and cultural development was evident in both art and English lessons. Improvements in personal development are reflected in the rising attendance rates and improved punctuality of the students. Though attendance overall is below average, this outcome is severely distorted by the very poor attendance records of a minority. Staff work tirelessly encouraging all students to attend regularly and promptly, but a tiny minority have poor habits. Such attitudes are difficult to counter, especially when they may be an absence of a good role model at home.

Leadership and management are good. The service is led by an inspirational headteacher who is strongly supported by a dedicated, committed and extremely hard working staff. The work of the staff is augmented by a good management committee. They have a keen understanding of the issues. They are supportive but also fulfil their critical friend role well. Senior staff have produced a good improvement plan. This document covers most relevant aspects well but strategies for raising academic standards and achievement need to be more explicit and the success criteria listed in the plan are not easily quantified. Self-evaluation is accurate. Good improvement has been made since the previous inspection and the centre provides good value for money. There is a good capacity for further improvement.

Agincourt House is successfully working to change the lives of vulnerable youngsters. As one parent commented: 'I would be lost without Agincourt. My son would be doing nothing. The kind staff have turned him round. He now comes to school. He works and is doing some GCSEs. I cannot thank the headteacher and her staff enough.'

What the school should do to improve further

- Modify the development plan to ensure that measures to improve standards and achievement further are clearly stated and that outcomes can be easily quantified.
- If students have proficiency in languages other than English, ensure they are given the opportunity to gain GCSE accreditation.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Most students have experienced considerable disruption to their education prior to entering Agincourt House. Significant work is undertaken to encourage the students to adopt good study practices. The students receive considerable encouragement and they are offered good opportunities to study GCSE and other qualifications. Some students are able to gain some C grades, or better, in their GCSEs and the range of courses available offers the students good opportunities to progress to the world of work, or to further education. Overall standards are below average, but the progress made by many, especially those who attend regularly, is good.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

For most students, the considerable and complex difficulties they arrive with diminish as their confidence and self-esteem improve. This improvement owes much to the dedication of the staff and the exceptionally caring support they offer. Most students generally get on well together and with their teachers and the other adults they work with. All students are given plenty of encouragement to adopt healthy and safe lifestyles. Healthy eating is promoted via a breakfast club and by the excellent food prepared on site. The promotion of safe and healthy lifestyles is a prominent feature of the personal, social and health education programme and good provision is made for physical recreation; students are able to access a considerable variety of sports courses. The students say they feel safe and that they have confidence in their staff to deal with any untoward incidents. Many say they enjoy their education more than before. As one Year 11 student said: 'I wish I didn't have to leave. The staff are fantastic. You don't know what you got until you lose it.'

The students are offered good opportunities to take and develop responsibility. There is a school council that meets weekly and this body has made suggestions that the centre's staff have pursued. For example, recently some students voluntarily redecorated parts of the school building. This is something that the students requested. All students are given significant encouragement to improve their skills in numeracy, computing and especially literacy. Many, however, continue to work at well below average level, compared to national levels. The level at which the students are working reflects the disruption they have suffered in their education. However, through the intensive emotional and social support and guidance given by staff, the attainment levels of students have risen by the time they leave. Nevertheless, the programmes offered satisfactorily prepare them for the next stage of school life, further education or work.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Good planning, based on careful assessment on entry ensures that students' needs are met well. This helps to ensure that good progress is made towards the targets set for each student. The teaching seen during the visit was at least good with some that was outstanding. Students make at least good progress because all teachers take care and time to explain ideas and work with the students individually to help them achieve. In lessons, considerable care is taken to explain key words, though not all opportunities to develop literacy skills are seized. Lessons were lively, enjoyable and challenging. Expectations are high and the students generally respond well and show interest. The classrooms are peaceful; the students behave well and show respect to each other and their teachers. The displays in classrooms, particularly in the English and Art rooms, are not only visually stimulating but excellent aids to learning through a focus on key words and phrases. In the lessons observed teachers used key words and displays to enhance learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

A good and thoughtful curriculum is offered. There is a good and relevant selection of subjects, most of which can be studied at GCSE and considerable effort is made to improving the students'

skills in literacy, numeracy and computing. Some students enter Agincourt House with high levels of proficiency in languages other than English. The centre has a good record of developing this talent for French speakers; where the students' skills are in other languages, chances to gain GCSE accreditation are not always taken. The curriculum caters well for vocational education; because of requests from students, this provision is to be extended further. Though on site facilities are limited, extra curricular provision is good and wide ranging because many offsite venues are used. Many of the students are keen on sport and physical fitness and good efforts are made to meet their needs.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The centre provides an outstandingly caring, compassionate and supportive environment. The students feel safe, develop their personal and social qualities very well and many make excellent progress towards the targets set for them. Individual education plans are regularly reviewed and discussed with students. The targets set are challenging and are carefully monitored in every single lesson. This is a very good way to ensure that progress is maintained and issues quickly identified and tackled.

The students, and their parents, are particularly appreciative of the careers advice given. Provision for ensuring health and safety is very strong. All current Government guidelines on child protection are fully met. Staff work hard to improve both attendance and punctuality, but the poor attitudes of a minority adversely distorts the overall attendance figure. The centre's multi-agency approach and use of outside professional agencies is excellent and greatly enhances the quality of support.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The inspirational headteacher, ably supported by her excellent staff, form a highly effective team. They are instrumental in developing the very good ethos for learning and achievement in the centre. Self-evaluation is rigorous and improvement planning is good. The areas identified for development are appropriate, though more explicit emphasis needs to be placed on raising standards and achievement. Though planning is good, the success criteria are not always clearly stated or easily quantified. All staff are highly committed to ensuring every student really matters, even to the extent of the headteacher taking some students for dinner to widen their social experiences. The sterling efforts of all staff help to motivate the students and improve their commitment and ultimately enabling them to move closer to achieving their full potential. Leadership has ensured the centre provides a welcoming, high quality and well-resourced learning environment. The centre's management committee, with key local representatives, is highly effective in its role as a supportive and critical friend.

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Annex A

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?	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	4
The behaviour of learners	2
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?	2
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?	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?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
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	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
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

02 June 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Agincourt House, London, NW3 2NY

Thank you for the welcome you gave me on my recent visit. I enjoyed learning about the work you are doing. Overall, I have concluded that you are offered a good standard of education. The centre is brilliantly led by the headteacher and her very good staff are all working hard to help you. For some of you your standards of work are below average compared with national standards. However, you are making good progress in your studies. Some of you are making very good progress. You are offered a good curriculum and the support and encouragement offered to you is outstanding. You benefit from good teaching and the centre provides you with a safe and caring environment in which to work. Though some of you need to improve your records of attendance, I was pleased to see how punctual many of you are and how well you behave. It was also pleasing to see you enjoying your work. I shall always remember the change of hair style some of the girls gave one of your staff!

I have suggested some areas for improvement. These are:

- if you can speak a language other than English or French, you should be given an opportunity and show commitment to study for a GCSE in that language
- staff should improve some aspects of the plans they make for your education.

Thank you for your contribution to this inspection. I really enjoyed meeting you all and I would like to wish you every success in your future endeavours.

Yours sincerely

Bill Stoneham

Lead Inspector