

Aylesbury Vale Secondary Support Centre

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110201
Local Authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	310219
Inspection date	5 June 2008
Reporting inspector	William Geoffrey Robson

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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	36
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Headteacher	Dr D Jones
Date of previous school inspection	25 April 2005
School address	Unit 8 Abbey Centre Weedon Road Aylesbury HP19 9NS
Telephone number	01296 387600
Fax number	01296 339125

Age group	11–16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

The centre provides for pupils with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. Many have been permanently excluded from mainstream schools, or are at risk of permanent exclusion. Provision for these pupils was the main focus of the inspection. Other pupils have been medically diagnosed as temporarily unfit to attend school. They receive home tuition and some are taught for a few hours each week in the centre. Centre staff also manage two forms of extended provision. An outreach service helps mainstream schools to support disaffected pupils and prevent further exclusions; the Stoke Mandeville Hospital teaching service maintains educational provision for pupils who are admitted to the hospital. The vast majority of pupils are of White British origin and about three quarters are boys.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The centre provides a good quality of education for its pupils. It is improving rapidly because of outstanding leadership by the recently appointed headteacher. Teachers have maintained a strong commitment to supporting pupils during a time of changing roles and responsibilities and the appointment of a new senior leadership team. Their dedication shines through all aspects of their work. In particular, they establish excellent relationships with pupils, who all say that they trust their teachers and get the support they need. Teachers know their pupils well, and have a clear understanding of their needs because they regularly share information about their progress. They set pupils challenging, individual targets that help them to improve their behaviour and control their emotions. As a result, in this safe environment, pupils make better progress with their work. Overall, academic standards remain very low because of the difficulties pupils have experienced prior to attending the centre. Nevertheless, pupils achieve well and many exceed the levels and grades that their mainstream schools had originally predicted.

Pupils clearly enjoy their time in the centre. It is reflected in their attendance, which improves significantly. Parents recognise this change in their children's attitudes. One parent wrote, 'I wish my son could have attended the centre full time instead of being at school.' However, one of the centre's developing strengths is the way in which it enables a good proportion of pupils to return successfully to mainstream education. This is partly because links with schools have improved considerably this year. The leadership team ensures that schools share information and responsibility for dual-registered pupils who are at risk of exclusion. It rightly recognises the need to build these links further, for example by improving communication about schemes of work being followed in some schools. Pupils respond well to opportunities to contribute to the local community. For example, several participate in a Prince's Trust project and have built a path for another pupil referral unit. They adopt healthy lifestyles whilst at the centre, by keeping to the no smoking policy and choosing to eat healthy foods. The centre has begun a kitchen garden project and several pupils talked knowledgeably about the benefits of growing their own vegetables. Pupils particularly enjoy taking part in weekly outdoor sporting activities led by a qualified instructor. This enables the centre to overcome some of the limitations of its accommodation. In several respects, the centre's accommodation is inadequate. There are insufficient outdoor areas for pupils to relax and socialise. Facilities for science are poor and the centre cannot offer design and technology on site.

Pupils make good progress with the key skills of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT). Opportunities for participating in work related learning have increased this year through the involvement of more alternative training providers. More are required to ensure that the centre can continue to meet pupils' individual needs. Parents are pleased with the good support the centre provides for work experience and all current Year 11 pupils anticipate moving into further education or training. This is another example of the way the centre significantly improves the life chances of its pupils. The centre does not have sufficient support from its management committee. There are too few members. This holds back the further development of liaison with schools, colleges and training providers in the local community. The committee recognises the recent improvements in the centre's curriculum and rates of reintegration. However, it does not support or challenge staff to do even better.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the membership of the management committee and ensure that members are clear about their roles and responsibilities.
- Develop stronger links with some mainstream schools, colleges and training providers, to build on recent improvements in the curriculum and rates of reintegration.
- Improve accommodation so that the centre is less restricted in the opportunities it can provide for pupils.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Most pupils enter the centre with very low standards because of the difficulties they have experienced in mainstream schools. Many have missed a lot of their education through poor attendance and several fixed term exclusions before attending the centre. Despite this, pupils begin to make good progress. Their significantly improved attendance helps them to build on their learning week by week. Teachers' regular assessments show that the majority reach or exceed challenging targets that are based on information provided by pupils' mainstream schools. Each year, nearly all pupils gain GCSE passes in English, mathematics and science. A few gain the higher A* to C grades. Current pupils are on track to achieve similar results. By comparison with national figures for all pupils, standards remain very low. Nevertheless, they represent good achievement for pupils who had little prospect of reaching their targets before they attended the centre. In addition, this year, pupils have achieved a much wider range of vocational qualifications than previously. These include certificates in computer literacy and awards for successful completion of work experience placements.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils develop well personally and socially, especially in view of the difficulties that they have experienced previously. They feel very secure in the centre as there is very little bullying. One boy said, 'Everyone's calmer. We've all been in the same situation and understand each other.' Pupils trust their teachers and rightly say, 'They're fair and pay attention to everyone.' These excellent relationships lead to much improved attendance, behaviour and attitudes. Their growing confidence and awareness of each other's needs are signs of their good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The centre is a civilised place, with pupils keen to learn and prepared to listen to each other as well as their teachers. Several pupils participate in the Princes Trust XL club and enjoy the opportunities it provides to contribute to the local community. However, others have few formal opportunities to take responsibility in the centre itself. For example, there is no student council. Pupils also say that they would like more leisure and social activities in the centre. These are partially limited by inadequate accommodation.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The good quality of teaching and learning is based on the excellent relationships that teachers establish with pupils. These enable them to manage any challenging behaviour very effectively. They establish clear expectations of pupils' behaviour in lessons through consistently reminding

pupils of their targets for personal development. Pupils say, 'You learn much more because nobody disturbs you.' Teachers' good subject knowledge enables them to explain things clearly in a way that interests pupils. Their good preparation of interesting resources, especially the effective use of interactive whiteboards, ensures that lessons move at a swift pace. Teachers are developing their use of assessment well. They are well aware of pupils' levels of attainment and plan a good variety of challenging activities as a result. They set clear learning objectives at the start of every lesson, and make them clear to pupils. However, lessons are only thirty minutes long. This often means that there is insufficient time to enable pupils to review their work and evaluate what they have learned. The pressure of time also means that teachers tend to dominate some lessons and do not provide enough opportunities for pupils to contribute to discussions.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The centre places an appropriate focus on the core subjects of English, mathematics and science, supplemented by a good range of other courses and activities. As a result, pupils make good progress with the key skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT. Opportunities for personal, social, health and citizenship education are well planned. Breakfast during morning registration appears informal. However, it makes an important contribution to developing pupils' self esteem and relationships with staff and each other. Meetings at the end of each morning and afternoon ensure that pupils understand their progress towards their personal development targets each day. Many pupils see their visits to a local sports and outdoor education centre as a highlight of their week. Activities such as climbing, mountain biking and kayaking help overcome the lack of facilities for physical education and enable pupils to gain Duke of Edinburgh awards in physical recreation.

The centre does not have adequate facilities to provide courses in design and technology. Staff have worked hard and successfully this year to overcome a lack of availability of vocational courses at the local college. Construction and vehicle maintenance courses at local skills centres have expanded opportunities for work related learning considerably, although still more are required. Curriculum links with mainstream schools have also improved. The best practice occurs when schools share schemes of work with the centre, to smooth pupils' eventual reintegration, but this is not yet the case with all schools or subjects.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

There are some outstanding features of this aspect of the centre's work. They stem from the obvious dedication of all staff to meeting pupils' needs. Excellent links with a range of outside agencies ensure professional support for pupils with more severe needs. Good advice and guidance for future careers and further education is available, with the result that the large majority of pupils progress to further education, training or employment.

Teachers have a thorough knowledge of pupils' needs, based on their initial assessments and the improving information received from mainstream schools. This enables them to set behaviour and academic targets, which are agreed with pupils. Behaviour targets are closely linked to rewards and pupils therefore take them seriously. Teachers track pupils' progress carefully, through weekly progress panel meetings and by acting as mentors to individual pupils. The result is that pupils know their targets and what they need to do to improve, although some targets are not as precise as they could be.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Since his appointment this year, the headteacher has quickly established a clear vision for the work of the centre. His outstanding leadership has ensured that the newly appointed assistant headteachers have quickly grown in confidence and effectiveness to become a strong, supportive team. They have clear roles and responsibilities and manage a complex range of provision well. The work of the outreach team, home and hospital tuition services, which were not inspected, is closely monitored and evaluated. There has been good improvement since the last inspection, but much of this has taken place over the last year, at an impressive pace. Self-evaluation has greatly improved and is good, partly because staff make increasingly effective use of data to identify priorities for development. As a result, the centre has good capacity for further improvement.

The centre's management committee is not sufficiently active in helping the centre to develop links with other schools, colleges and the local community. In light of this, the headteacher's success in establishing agreements with local schools, to share responsibility for pupils at risk of permanent exclusion, is all the more remarkable.

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?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
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	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

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?	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?	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	2
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	1
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	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

18 June 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Aylesbury Vale Secondary Support Centre, Aylesbury, HP19 9NS

I really enjoyed visiting your centre and would like to thank you for your warm welcome and for being so friendly and helpful. I agree with you that the centre is a good place to learn. You told me that you get on extremely well with the teachers and I could see that during my visit. This letter is to let you know what your centre does well and how, with your help, it can be an even better place to learn. My main finding is that the school provides you with a good quality of education.

The best things about the centre are that:

- staff really care for you and provide good support and guidance
- you develop excellent relationships with staff, become more confident and improve your behaviour and attendance a lot; those of you who are going through a difficult time in your lives make good progress in overcoming your difficulties
- good teaching helps you to progress well with your work
- your headteacher is an outstanding leader.

To make it even better, I have asked the centre to improve three things.

- Get more people to join the centre's management committee, so that the committee can give the headteacher more support.
- Work more closely with some schools, colleges and training providers. In this way the centre can help more of you get back to school more quickly. It can also give you more choice of vocational courses.
- Improve the accommodation at the centre, so that it can provide more things for you to do and learn.

Thank you again for your help. I hope you continue to work hard, do well and make the most of the good opportunities that the centre provides for you.

Yours sincerely,

William Robson

Lead Inspector