

Vermont School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	116625
Local Authority	Southampton
Inspection number	312350
Inspection date	8 October 2007
Reporting inspector	James Bowden

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	5-11
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number on roll	
School	20
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr John Lilly
Headteacher	Mrs Jacki Wilson
Date of previous school inspection	19 January 2004
School address	Vermont Close off Winchester Road Southampton SO16 7LT
Telephone number	023 8076 7988
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Age group	5-11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Vermont school provides for learners with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. Currently, there are only learners in Years 4, 5 and 6. All have a statement of special educational need and are admitted at different times during the school year. Most join the school with a history of non-attendance and extreme behaviour, which in many instances led to exclusion from their mainstream school. Consequently, many learners have considerable gaps in their skills and knowledge, particularly in terms of communication, language and literacy. Currently, all are of White British origin and 10 per cent are looked after by the local authority. A significant minority have mental health problems, exhibiting very violent and unpredictable behaviour. The school also provides an Outreach Service offering advice and training for colleagues in mainstream schools.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Vermont provides very effectively for all its learners and successfully develops their academic and personal potential in a safe, stimulating and supportive learning environment. The pastoral care, guidance and support given to learners are particularly strong, and the promotion of their personal development and well-being is at the centre of the school's work.

The school works very well with outside agencies to support learners and has outstanding partnerships with others to promote learners' well being. A particular strength are the links with other schools as a result of the school's Outreach Service, which is much appreciated. A headteacher of a local primary school commented that the service provides expertise to enable teachers to be successful with potentially difficult learners as well as providing effective strategies for parents themselves to help their children. Most parents are very supportive because of the help the school gives them and the difference it makes to their children. One parent wrote, 'The school meets all of our child's needs. I cannot ask for more.'

Pupils' achievement is good. For many learners attainment is well below what is expected when they arrive. Some are underachieving as a result of absence, exclusion and their behavioural, emotional and social needs. However, the school successfully develops their enthusiasm for learning and, as a result, learners make good progress from their starting points. Pupils in Year 6 achieved particularly well in 2007. Although standards are below average overall some of these pupils reached the levels expected for their age.

Learners' personal development, including the spiritual, moral, social and cultural aspects is good. In a Year 6, emotional literacy lesson all reacted well to the focus on improving their confidence and self esteem. All made sensible and sensitive comments about their own strengths as well as the strengths of their peers. Overall, behaviour is satisfactory. During the inspection most learners behaved well in lessons and at break times, some being very confident in welcoming visitors to their school. Attendance overall is good and for most it is much higher than in their mainstream schools.

Teaching and learning are good overall and as a result learners make good progress. Teachers and support staff know their learners very well. Learners are managed well and occasional outbursts of inappropriate behaviour are dealt with calmly, consistently and effectively. Excellent information and communication technology (ICT) resources are routinely used to enliven learning and improve learners' capabilities in their use. However, the consistency and quality of marking of learners' work varies somewhat. This means learners do not always know the levels they are working at or what they need to do to improve. The curriculum is good because it meets the needs of learners well. However, the delivery of key literacy and numeracy lessons in one-hour blocks is sometimes too much for pupils and results in some learners losing concentration. Enrichment activities are good and support learners' personal development very well.

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher and her senior team have been instrumental in developing a strong ethos for learning and achievement. Effective self-evaluation processes have enabled the school to clearly identify what developments are necessary to improve further. Though the leadership team have access to a wealth of data, the efficient use of this data to help inform planning for further improvements lacks rigour. Issues raised at the previous inspection have been successfully dealt with. The governing body, in particular the chair, works closely with the school and is very effective as a supportive and critical friend. The

effective leadership of the headteacher and developments in provision, together with the school's improving track record by the end of Year 6, show there is good capacity to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Reduce the length of literacy and numeracy lessons to help learners to maintain concentration.
- Improve the quality and consistency of marking to ensure learners know what levels they are working at and what they need to do to improve.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

The school works hard to settle learners, improve their behaviour and generate success by making learning relevant to each individual's needs. As a result, learners make up for lost time and make good progress. In 2007, Year 6 pupils exceeded their challenging targets. Their achievement was particularly good in relation to their starting points. Progress in English is slower than in mathematics and science. Nevertheless, most learners achieve well overall as they move through the school. The few looked after by local authorities make quicker progress overall as well as making good progress towards the targets set for them on their personal and educational plans. The school attributes this to their improved attendance and settled atmosphere provided for them.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

For many learners, the difficulties they arrive with diminish as their confidence and self-esteem improve. Some, however, take more time than others and continue to struggle in coming to terms with school and its expectations of behaviour. Although there are occasional outbursts, most learners generally get on well together and with their teachers and other adults they work with. Their personal development was supported well in a whole school morning assembly that celebrated learners' achievements and allowed them time to reflect on issues linked to the school's policy for 'listening, asking, trying, concentrating and helping' (LATCH). At the end of this assembly they sang with gusto a song adapted to reflect the life of the school. Their adoption of healthy lifestyles is good, and they enjoy the range of physical activities on offer. Learners know the importance of eating healthily and look forward to the school breakfast as well as taking opportunities to eat fruit or drink water or milk in their classrooms throughout the day. They say they feel safe and have an adult to talk to should they feel this necessary. When there are incidents of bullying, they report that the school deals with these effectively. They also realise that on occasion some of their peers may have to be 'restrained' by adults if their behaviour becomes dangerous to others. Learners' views, including their views on sanctions and rewards, are listened to and acted upon through regular meetings of the school council. The council also has a budget to spend on school improvements. They also take on responsibilities during the school day. Learners' improvement in literacy, numeracy and ICT skills prepares them satisfactorily for the next stage of school life as does their developing ability to recognise their own skills and achievements they highlight in their Individual Record of Achievement files.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Detailed planning ensures the needs of all learners are met, thus ensuring progress is made towards their targets, in individual education plans (IEPs), for example. When appropriate, learners are enabled to work on a one-to-one basis with an adult. Positive working relationships between learners and staff underpin the quality of learning in lessons. Activities are made interesting, resources are used well and effort and achievement is consistently rewarded. In a Year 6 mathematics lesson, learners used interactive technology confidently and competently when relating fractions to the principles of division of number. This encouraged their enthusiasm for learning and their aspirations to make progress. A learner reported that he liked the clear explanations offered by teachers and the challenge he received. Teachers' use of oral praise and encouragement is effective in lessons and helps motivate learners further but written comments provided are inconsistent in their quality. Nevertheless, teachers' records show that they carefully monitor the progress learners make.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The good curriculum matches learners' needs, improves their motivation for learning and results in good progress. However, the progress made by some learners in literacy and numeracy lessons is slower because some of them find difficulty in concentrating for the full hour. Learners also have opportunities for them to choose their own activities, some, for example, choosing extra swimming and others gardening. Weekly emotional literacy lessons and personal, social, health and education (PSHE) lessons contribute significantly to learners' personal development. A recently started project involves all Year 4 learners in weekly music activities taught by specialist teachers. The focus on key skills and a reward system with a financial basis (spending points gained) helps prepare learners for the next stage of their education.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school provides a particularly strong, caring and supporting environment where learners feel safe, develop their personal qualities and make good progress towards the targets set for them. A home-school agreement signed by learners, their parents, as well as the school, underpins this aspect of the school's provision. Individual and personal educational plans are reviewed on a regular basis and parents are kept informed regularly as to the progress their child is making. All learners, including those most at risk, are well supported. Incidents and physical restraint records are carefully logged and annotated when appropriate. The use of physical restraint has declined significantly since the previous inspection and is now below the percentage found nationally in similar schools. Procedures for 'internal' exclusion from lessons have significantly reduced the number of fixed-term exclusions of learners.

When learners arrive at the school their academic and personal strengths are carefully assessed. Along with the sometimes limited data available from previous schools, this enables teachers to plan individualised programmes to meet learners' precise needs. Careful tracking of individuals helps the school to determine the progress made by learners and to set targets for further

improvement, particularly in English, mathematics and science. Learners are enabled to make successful transition to the next stage of their education.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher and her senior team have a clear focus on improving learning, achievement and learners' behaviour. All staff are highly committed to ensuring every learner really matters in a caring and supportive environment. As a result, learners achieve very well by the time they leave the school. Self-evaluation and improvement planning is robust, areas identified for development being very appropriate. Challenging targets are set for English, mathematics and science at the end of Year 6 to help improve standards further. However, the efficiency of the collection of and use of this data lacks rigour. Resources are now managed effectively and, along with the local authority, the school and governing body have agreed a plan to reduce the outstanding budget deficit and move in to surplus in the near future.

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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	2
The behaviour of learners	3
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	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?	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	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	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

16 October 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Vermont School, Southampton, SO16 7LT

I recently spent a day at your school, visited you in lessons and saw some of you taking part in other activities. I also chatted to a group of you about your opinions on the education provided for you. Thank you all very much for being really friendly and making me feel welcome. I was impressed with your honesty and openness when explaining your views. You receive a good education at Vermont. This is because:

- the headteacher and her senior team lead the school particularly well
- teaching is good, which means you all make good progress towards your personal targets
- you appreciate how teachers help you to learn, particularly in the way they explain things to you
- all adults who work with you make sure you are safe and really well cared for
- they are very dedicated, have your best interests at heart and want to make sure you do well in the future
- the curriculum and other activities during the day make your education very interesting
- ICT is used really well to help you learn and you appreciate being able to use this.

There are two things the school could do to make things even better for you:

- teach literacy and numeracy lessons in shorter lessons during the morning to help you concentrate more
- mark your work more clearly to make sure you know the levels you are working at and what you need to do to improve your work.

Once again, many thanks for your welcome and I would like to wish you all the best for your future.

James Bowden

Lead inspector