

North Area Pupil Referral Unit

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	130344
Local Authority	HERTFORDSHIRE LA
Inspection number	315618
Inspection dates	5–6 December 2007
Reporting inspector	Margaret Goodchild

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	5–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	62
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Maggie Woods
Headteacher	Mrs Julie Vernon-Hamilton
Date of previous school inspection	22 February 2005
School address	Briar Patch Lane Letchworth Hertfordshire SG6 3LY
Telephone number	01462 487208
Fax number	01462 481848

Age group	5–16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

The school provides on-site tuition for pupils at Key Stage 4 who have been permanently excluded, or are at serious risk of permanent exclusion and are dual registered with their mainstream schools. It also provides a reintegration programme for pupils in Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 and outreach support to 52 primary schools, seven secondary schools and two middle schools. All the pupils have social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and have had negative experiences of education. The vast majority of pupils are of White British heritage and many come from areas that include high levels of social deprivation. Attainment on entry varies: it is below average overall, ranging from broadly average to well below average. The centre expanded its provision at the beginning of this term to operate across a split site, with a GCSE programme at the original site in Letchworth and a vocational programme at a new site in Hitchin. The school has gained a Healthy Schools award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good pupil referral unit. Parents express a high level of satisfaction with its work and say, for example, 'We owe the centre a lot, without it who knows what would have happened to our child'. The centre has made good improvement since the last inspection and some features of its work are outstanding. It is led and managed well and has a good capacity to improve further. The headteacher and other senior leaders provide exceptionally clear educational direction and are strongly committed to including all pupils and meeting their needs as fully as possible.

Teaching is consistently good and there are instances of outstanding teaching. Recent expansion, with the opening of a second site, has enabled the centre to provide a curriculum matched exceptionally well to pupils' differing needs, being either predominantly academic or vocational. Although the centre is still refining its vocational courses, the new Bancroft site is innovative in the learning opportunities it provides, very closely reflecting the skills required within a work setting.

Achievement is good and some pupils make outstanding progress, especially where they attend the Letchworth site full time or receive intensive one-to-one support. Standards are below average overall but higher attaining pupils gain a range of qualifications broadly in line with the national average. The centre gained its best ever examination results in 2007, when pupils were all successful in the examinations they took. It has begun to keep a record of the academic progress of a small sample of the pupils in mainstream schools who receive support from its outreach staff. However, this information is insufficient to form a clear view of the effect of outreach support on academic progress. More importantly, the centre has not established a system for collecting detailed information about the prior attainment or identified learning difficulties of pupils when mainstream schools refer them for outreach support. Measuring the full effectiveness of outreach provision is therefore impossible, but the staff are highly effective in improving pupils' behaviour and, thus, enabling them to remain in mainstream school.

Outstanding care, guidance and support enable pupils to make substantial improvement in their personal development, self-esteem and general attitude to education. Pupils are prepared well for the future and gain a range of qualities and skills that should stand them in good stead as they move on to further education, training or employment. Behaviour is good overall and pupils are positive about the opportunities available to them at the centre. They greatly enjoy the time they spend there and readily become involved in activities such as the Christmas play. Since the last inspection, the centre has been successful in significantly increasing the rate of attendance so that it is now above that normally found in similar establishments.

What the school should do to improve further

- Through closer work with mainstream schools, put in place a comprehensive system for collecting information about the prior attainment and learning needs of pupils in receipt of outreach support.
- Measure the impact of outreach support on pupils' academic progress and use this information to evaluate more fully the effectiveness of the provision.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Progress is particularly good in English, mathematics and science at the Letchworth site, where GCSE and entry level courses are well established. In 2007, a quarter of pupils gained five or more GCSE passes and nearly two thirds gained four passes. Pupils make good progress towards the targets in their individual education plans. Those with learning difficulties achieve well and higher attaining pupils do especially well. It is too early to make an overall judgement about the progress of pupils on newly established vocational courses, but it is clear that they have begun to gain valuable work-related learning skills that should put them in a good position to move on to higher level courses or employment. All the pupils who left at the end of Year 11 in 2007 went on to further education, training or employment.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Parents comment on the way the centre brings out the best in their children, encouraging them to be calm and to behave well. Pupils make outstanding progress in their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and relationships between pupils and staff are of high quality. Pupils' enjoyment and motivation is evident in the progress they make on accredited courses and the fact that almost all primary and secondary-aged pupils in receipt of outreach support manage to remain in mainstream school. Most pupils in the centre display positive attitudes and behave well. However, the disaffection of a minority of newly arrived students, particularly girls, places a limit on their progress in some lessons. Pupils are developing a good understanding of healthy living and a thorough knowledge of how to keep safe. They make a good contribution to the community, for instance, through contributing their ideas about how the centre might improve and taking part in performances.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers have good knowledge of the subjects they teach and plan lessons very thoroughly. These include a good range of motivating activities matched well to pupils' learning needs. Teachers use information and communication technology well to support learning in a range of subjects. Teaching assistants make a significant contribution to pupils' progress in class and through the support they provide to individual pupils. In most lessons, staff are skilled in managing behaviour and, as a result, pupils are very focused and apply themselves well. Occasionally, expectations for work and behaviour are not high enough so that some pupils make less progress than they should. Thorough assessment and recording systems are in place for identifying the learning needs and tracking the progress of pupils who attend the centre. Effective systems are in place for identifying the behavioural needs of pupils who receive outreach support. However, staff collect limited information from mainstream schools about these pupils' prior attainment and any learning difficulties that may be causing or exacerbating their behavioural difficulties. This means that teachers are sometimes working with incomplete information about pupils they support in mainstream schools.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is broad, balanced and highly relevant to pupils' needs and aspirations. The centre matches individual programmes very closely to pupils' needs and is highly flexible in fitting opportunities around the changing needs of individual pupils. Good procedures are in place to promote pupils' literacy and numeracy skills, and information and communication technology supports achievement well across the curriculum. Activities week provides a wide range of learning experiences, ranging from encounters with birds of prey to learning how to use henna to apply mehndi patterns. Pupils' awareness of healthy living is promoted effectively through events such as health awareness day, and their knowledge of possible future choices is enhanced by careers conventions where local employers run workshops. A wide range of additional activities includes various trips and educational visits, working with artists in residence and taking part in the annual Christmas play, craft fair and sponsored walk.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The centre provides an outstanding level of care and support and offers a good level of guidance. Thorough procedures are in place for keeping pupils safe and ensuring that they are protected. Staff are extremely sensitive to pupils' personal needs and backgrounds, and continuously track and analyse their personal progress. Good systems are in place for checking how well they are doing academically and pupils are kept well-informed about how to improve their work. Very close liaison is in place with other agencies and educational establishments to ensure support is matched precisely to pupils' emotional and behavioural needs. The centre has effective systems for promoting good behaviour, based around building constructive relationships with individual pupils. This meets most pupils' needs very well but a small minority of recent arrivals would benefit at times from clearer boundaries to ensure they make the most of their time at the centre.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Effective systems are in place for checking the quality of provision at the centre, including that within subjects, and teachers have good opportunities to observe one another's work. Staff have very good opportunities to undertake training and many are highly experienced in working with pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties. The school has expanded significantly in recent months and taken on a substantial number of staff, including youth workers who previously worked in other settings and new teaching staff who are leading on vocational courses. Procedures are very well established at the Letchworth site; senior managers are working to develop and embed systems at the Bancroft site. Nevertheless, the headteacher has succeeded in ensuring that the newly expanded staff team is already working with a shared sense of purpose. Mainstream schools are highly appreciative of the support the centre provides and procedures are effective for evaluating the impact of outreach provision on pupils' behaviour, though not yet entirely on their learning. The centre is supported well by the local authority through regular reviews of its work and well-established systems such as those for the admission and transfer of pupils. The management committee fulfils a valuable role, both supporting and challenging the work of the centre. Recent developments in the curriculum and a significant

improvement in facilities for vocational courses reveal a very effective collaboration between the headteacher and management committee, underpinned by good support from the local authority, which gives the centre good capacity to improve further.

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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?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
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?	1
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	1
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	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

8 December 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of North Area Pupil Referral Unit, Letchworth, SG6 3LY

Thank you for making me feel welcome when I visited North Area Pupil Referral Unit. I enjoyed my visit and now I am writing to tell you what I found out about it.

This is a good pupil referral unit. It helps you to make good progress and those of you in Years 10 and 11 who are studying for GCSE courses at the Letchworth site do particularly well. Those pupils who come in for individual sessions at the end of the day also do very well. This is because teaching is always good and at times even better than that. The new site at Bancroft provides some very exciting learning opportunities. This gives you a really good taste, for example, of what it would be like to work in a hairdressing salon, or in the construction or motor vehicles trade. At the same time, the centre makes sure you gain many other skills as well so that you are prepared well for when you move on to further education, training or employment.

The time you spend at the centre, or being helped by outreach teachers who come from the centre into your primary and secondary schools, helps you a great deal by improving the way you feel about yourself and the way you behave. This is because the staff are very sensitive to your needs and always supportive. Most of you behave well and I was pleased to see that nearly all of you attend regularly.

The headteacher and other senior managers provide very clear direction to the centre's work and they want to make it as good as possible for you. Where you receive support from outreach teachers, I have asked them to find out more about what you can already do and whether you find some types of learning more difficult than others. They already check how much their help improves your behaviour but I have asked them to check how much it also helps you with your work and learning.

You can help them by behaving well all the time and making the most of the opportunities the centre provides for you.

Best wishes

Margaret Goodchild

Lead inspector