

# South West Pupil Referral Unit

Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	130349
<b>Local Authority</b>	HERTFORDSHIRE LA
<b>Inspection number</b>	315619
<b>Inspection dates</b>	31 January –1 February 2008
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	George Derby

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Pupil referral unit
<b>School category</b>	Pupil referral unit
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	5–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	54
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The local authority
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Susan Howe
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	22 February 2005
<b>School address</b>	Chessbrook Education Support Centre Tolpits Lane Watford Hertfordshire WD18 6LJ
<b>Telephone number</b>	01923 212025
<b>Fax number</b>	01923 225774

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

## Description of the school

Known more commonly as the Chessbrook Education Support Centre (ESC), this pupil referral unit performs a range of functions. These all involve supporting students who have been permanently excluded or who are at risk of exclusion. There are a number of relatively short-term provisions on site, including sessional nurture facilities for pupils in Key Stages 1 and 2 and 24 hours per week of on-site education for Key Stage 3 students.

Longer-term provision is available for Key Stage 4 students. Their week is made up of education at the centre, college courses and work experience. Some of these students are the responsibility of another organisation within the local authority (LA) and, in these cases, only a small amount of taught time is purchased from the centre. From September 2008, Chessbrook will manage all the Key Stage 4 programmes and the accommodation is being expanded to cope with this development.

A major part of the centre's work is preventative 'outreach' work, supporting students in primary and secondary schools who are experiencing behavioural, emotional, and social difficulties in mainstream schools.

A few of the centre's students have learning difficulties, but most have fallen considerably behind with their work because of behaviour problems in their previous schools. As a result, their attainment on entry is low. Their emotional development is also severely affected and many arrive feeling angry, confused and resentful.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

Chessbrook ESC is an effective centre.

'We come here and learn because the staff respect us and we respect them back.' This powerful statement was made by a number of Year 11 students who have been disaffected and have seen themselves as failures in mainstream school. The desire of one student, who had clearly turned a corner, was to increase her time at the centre to study more GCSEs! Other students say how the staff care about what they do and they know they want them to do their best. Students who have often caused havoc in their previous establishments are seen working calmly, talking respectfully and reflecting on their life and work. This is because the atmosphere in the centre is so conducive to this. However, all this success does not happen overnight. It is through the hard work and dedication of the staff, effective teamwork and the good leadership and management of the senior team. Moreover, the outstanding leadership of the headteacher, through her crystal-clear vision and sheer drive and determination, has clearly enabled the centre to raise its game. It is well placed to improve further.

Underpinning the success of this good pupil referral unit, which has much to celebrate, are the outstanding relationships that staff build with students. The staff successfully engage the students through these relationships and through good teaching with work which is well tailored to the students' needs. Students are managed superbly, and questioning, to probe and build their understanding, is a clear strength. At the heart of everything is the staff's understanding of students' emotional needs. It is augmented by the excellent care, support and guidance that is available to students attending the centre, especially the counselling for pupils in crisis and the reintegration work. As a result, students' personal development is outstanding.

In addition, work with parents and carers, and their attendance at the centre, a requirement for a primary nurture place, ensures that the family and child work together and that parents support the objectives of the placement. Parents are extremely positive about the centre's work and staff are very responsive to their views, such as taking effective steps to improve aspects of communication as a result of a recent survey. One parent talked about the transformation in her son's life and his successful reintegration; she identified that it was because 'the staff are also there for me.'

The centre puts the students at the heart of learning, and the good curriculum generally meets their needs well. However, while information and communication technology (ICT) is used it is not taught as a subject. Strong assessment on entry helps to compensate for the frequent lack of information about a students' prior academic performance. Getting students to assess how well they have done, saying what they can do better and taking responsibility for themselves, helps them to make good progress and achieve things that did not appear possible previously. Although their attainment is below average overall, in summer 2007, 88% of the students gained four GCSE passes each. The centre is good at assessing students' learning and keeping a track of their individual performance. It uses a whole range of measures to do this, although it has only relatively recently started to look at trends and patterns in students' progress overall.

The senior team know the centre's strengths and weaknesses well and the work of coordinators has been improved. They have an increased role in development planning and in monitoring and evaluating their areas, although some do this more thoroughly than others. They take a full role in liaising with other schools to moderate their assessments and report this information to the centre's effective management committee. At present, there is still some way to go to

in terms of analysis of all the data they have and to feed this information into improvements in provision.

The support that primary and secondary schools get through the centre's outreach programme is outstanding. The schools are extremely positive about the quality of support, the timely response by the centre and the extremely good outcomes for students. This is a very well placed service within the LA's continuum of provision and is outstandingly led and managed by centre staff. The LA and management committee measure the programme's success by the feedback they get from schools through a centre questionnaire. However, they do not have specific performance criteria, as such, by which to measure 'outreach' provision.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Ensure that ICT is taught as a subject and that students make at least adequate progress.
- Ensure there is rigorous analysis of performance data by subject leaders and that findings lead to improvement in provision.
- Produce agreed criteria against which the performance of the outreach staff and the service as a whole can be evaluated.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 2**

The tracking and recorded outcomes of students' attainments over recent years show that students make good academic progress from their starting points and achieve well. On the whole, GCSE and Entry Level examination and Key Stage 3 test results have shown an upward trend year on year. Some students make remarkable improvements in their reading and spelling and all do in 'learning to learn'. This is because the centre precisely assesses their individual 'barriers to learning' and sets them challenging targets. Their willingness to re-engage in learning results in them doing so well. Although the teaching of English motivates and inspires students and their progress is good, writing still remains a weakness though and many are reluctant to write at length. Progress in mathematics is also good. Art is very popular with students. Performance in art is best of all the subjects in GCSE examinations because of its practical nature, its very high profile in the centre and the considerable expertise of the staff. Progress in science is satisfactory.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 1**

Students' attitudes, behaviour and personal development are outstanding. The transformation in these is remarkable. It results in many students returning to mainstream school and older students achieving well to gain academic awards. All of this is an effective preparation for future life, especially at college. Through the work of the centre the students realise that they are responsible for their own destinies and they learn to take responsibility. The excellent relationships they develop with staff and the high quality support they receive add greatly to this empowerment. As a result, often for the first time, they enjoy learning and outstandingly so. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. This is principally because of the way students learn to reflect on what they do and manage their anger or frustration; it is also because their self-esteem and confidence has soared. Students learn effectively to keep themselves safe and healthy. The work which has resulted in the centre's Healthy School Award, the sporting opportunities on offer and the centre's counselling has done much to improve the

way the students think about their health, including their mental health. Community participation is good; the new school council is already having an influence on how the centre is run.

The attendance of the majority of students improves markedly, although a few students still find it difficult to rise to the challenge of daily routine in their lives and in getting themselves ready to attend school. The actual attendance figure is typical of this type of establishment and is satisfactory. Systems to monitor and support attendance from the centre are thorough. The centre has set challenging targets to raise attendance further.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 2**

Staff bring an excitement to learning. This is through using a range of resources and different methods, most of which are practical. Increasingly, the new interactive whiteboards are used to enhance learning. Staff plan thoroughly and identify clearly what different students will learn. Students are at the centre of learning and there is much reflection on what they have done and what they can do better. Assessment is a particular strength and helps to ensure that the staff know their individual students and their needs well. The steps in learning are broken down precisely so that students can succeed, and that success breeds success. On occasion, too much emphasis is placed on students using methods without fully understanding what they are doing, and they are not challenged enough to ensure that experiments are carried out with sufficient precision.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

#### **Grade: 2**

The Year 7 to Year 10 programmes are the responsibility of the centre and there is a good balance of academic, practical work and sport. There are particularly effective programmes for personal, social and health education and citizenship. The curriculum also includes counselling, therapeutic aspects and review of weekly performance, activities that are all tailored precisely to students' needs.

The induction programme is particularly good because it addresses issues which prepare students for their time at the centre. All Year 11 programmes are managed by another provider. However, four GCSE courses in English, mathematics, science and art are on offer as well as four Entry Level courses; this latter provision includes the option of the centre's impressive food technology course.

Although the LA's policy is for ESCs to teach ICT as a subject, at Chessbook it is only used across the curriculum as a learning tool. The curriculum is undergoing a major review in preparation for its new role from September and there are plans to rectify this shortcoming.

### **Care, guidance and support**

#### **Grade: 1**

Students are extremely well cared for through the centre's extremely wide ranging support systems. Clear systems and procedures are in place to protect them from harm. Their academic and personal development is of paramount importance. Links with external agencies and the network of schools outstandingly support students' welfare and learning. Relationships with partner primary and secondary schools are excellent, and the staff from these are effusive in

their praise of the impact of the centre. A wide range of indicators is used by the centre to demonstrate students' progress. These indicators relate to the centre's aims for re-engaging students and preparing them for entry into school or college. A new academic tracking system is helping to identify more precisely term-on-term progress for individual students, which is especially important for those on short-term placements.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

Leadership and management are good and the centre has improved much since the last inspection. The effective senior leadership team, working closely with staff, constantly reflect on what has been done and what can be done better. The introduction of much needed systems and procedures has strengthened the quality of the centre's work and it runs like a well-oiled machine. As a result, the senior team has lots of information about how effective the centre is. The management committee provide strong support and also effectively challenge and hold the centre to account for its outcomes. Detailed analysis of trends and patterns in academic progress of whole cohorts of students is relatively new and lacks sophistication. As a result, all leaders are not yet fully in a position to identify more precisely how provision can be improved. Criteria against which leaders can evaluate their success have not yet been fully agreed.

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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 <sup>1</sup> 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	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	1
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?	1

<sup>1</sup> 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**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	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	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**

4 February 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of South West Area Pupil Referral Unit (Chessbrook Education Support Centre),  
Watford, Hertfordshire, WD18 6LJ

You do well at this good centre. Mrs Howe and her team have worked extremely hard to make it what it is. You make good academic progress because it puts you at the heart of everything it does. In fact, in your personal development, particularly in your attitudes and behaviour, you do exceptionally well. Most of you make a remarkable transformation in wanting to learn.

The centre clearly identifies what stops you learning and gives back to you the responsibility for your progress. However, it does not leave you alone to do this; it helps and guides you extremely carefully on this journey, which for some of you has been very painful. It shows you there is light at the end of the tunnel and you succeed well in your goal to go to back to mainstream school or on to college.

One of the biggest factors in all this is that you learn to trust and respect the staff and develop great confidence in your own abilities. As a result, relationships in the centre are excellent. You thoroughly enjoy the good teaching because of the close attention on what you need to learn.

You generally use ICT for learning but I have asked the centre to ensure you are taught this as subject. I have also asked the staff with responsibility for subjects to think about how they can analyse in a more detailed way the progress you all make so it tells them about the provision and the improvements that need to be made. Many of you will know that the centre also helps lots of schools and students who do not come to the centre. I have asked the leaders of this work to think more about how they can measure the success of their work.

Well done to all of you. Those few of you who still find it too difficult to attend are missing a 'ticket' to success!

George Derby

Lead inspector