

Dacorum Education Support Centre

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	131100
Local Authority	HERTFORDSHIRE LA
Inspection number	315717
Inspection date	11 March 2008
Reporting inspector	Declan McCarthy

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	39
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Headteacher	Mrs Rena Harris-Cooksley
Date of previous school inspection	26 April 2004
School address	30 Tenzing Road Hemel Hempstead Hertfordshire HP2 4HS
Telephone number	01442 247476
Fax number	01442 243327

Age group	11-16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the Centre and investigated the following issues: whether all pupils were on course to achieve as well as they can during this academic year, the impact of leadership and management on teaching and the curriculum and its impact on achievement. The effectiveness of the work of the outreach service and the Centre's capacity to improve were also evaluated. Evidence was gathered from discussions with the headteacher, senior staff, a sample of three mainstream headteachers, the local authority officer, parents and pupils. In addition, there was observation of parts of several lessons on both sites, scrutiny of school information including its analysis of assessment data and the outcomes of its monitoring of the quality of teaching. The Centre's self-evaluation, pupils work and parent questionnaires were also analysed. Other aspects of the Centre's work were not investigated in detail but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified. Where appropriate, these have been included in this report.

Description of the school

The Centre caters for pupils at Key Stages 3 and 4, who have been permanently excluded or who are at serious risk of permanent exclusion. There are 55 places available and there are currently 39 pupils on roll. The proportion of pupils with statements is above average and there are no pupils with English as an additional language (EAL). Nearly all pupils are from White British backgrounds and very few are from other ethnic minority groups. Pupils come from a variety of backgrounds and are placed at the Centre for approximately one term. Occasionally, depending on individual needs, this is extended, to two or three terms, or shortened to six weeks. Pupils arrive with below average levels of attainment and a history of disaffected behaviour. They also have a record of poor attendance or a history of truanting from school. The Centre aims to re-engage pupils with learning in mainstream schools or to prepare them for further education, training or employment. The outreach service works with mainstream staff and parents to provide in-school support for children in the Foundation Stage and pupils in Key Stages 1 to 4 who are at risk of exclusion. In addition, the service works with pupils who are transferring from primary to secondary schools and pupils who are being re-integrated back into mainstream after a period of exclusion. The Centre has Investor In People status for the second time and the Hertfordshire School Self Evaluation Accreditation. It is currently working towards the National Information Technology Mark and Healthy Schools Status.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

The Centre is outstandingly effective and provides excellent value for money. Pupils make outstanding progress because extremely effective leadership has assured an excellent ethos for learning, teaching of the highest quality and an extremely well thought out curriculum matched precisely to pupils' needs. Outstanding leadership has also led to excellent care, guidance and support for all pupils so that they make outstanding progress in their personal development, including their spiritual moral social and cultural development.

The work of the outreach service is also outstanding and very highly regarded by mainstream schools, outside agencies and parents. The excellent joint work of outreach staff and staff from the Centre ensures that pupils are extremely well prepared to return to mainstream schools. The outreach service is also highly effective in helping schools to manage their pupils' behaviour more effectively so that exclusions are prevented. They also provide outstanding support to ensure the very smooth transfer of pupils with behaviour difficulties from primary to secondary schools and from middle to upper schools.

Assessment systems for recording and tracking pupils' progress in the Centre and in mainstream schools are outstanding. Records show that standards move from below average to broadly average within one year and that, in recent years, standards have been rising steadily. This confirms the outstanding progress pupils are making. Staff have the highest expectations in lessons and make excellent use of assessment information in planning learning and in setting targets for pupils. For example, results of GCSE mock examinations are used to set challenging targets, which are pitched at one grade higher than predicted from their results. Consequently, pupils achieve average grades of B to D in their GCSE examination within only one year after previously sustained periods of absence and disaffection in learning. Pupils and parents alike are very pleased with this rapid progress. Pupils say that staff always help them and expect them to do well. During discussion, one parent spoke very proudly of her son's excellent achievements in science after a very short period of time at the Centre.

The Centre's detailed analysis of assessment information shows that pupils make rapid gains in their reading ages and in National Curriculum levels for all subjects within a very short period of time, confirming pupils' outstanding academic progress. For example, Key Stage 3 pupils who had been at the Centre for one term increased their National Curriculum levels by two or more sub levels. A secondary mainstream school reported that their data showed that one pupil who had returned to them from the Centre had made outstanding progress, which was accurately reflected in their improved value results. Pupils are provided with an excellent range of opportunities to gain a wide range of qualifications at the Centre, including National Vocational Qualifications, B Tech diplomas, Unit Awards, Entry Level Certificates, Bronze and Silver Youth Awards as well as GCSEs. They leave the Centre with a minimum of five GCSEs and already after only six weeks, all Key Stage 4 pupils have gained 5 Unit Awards in their highly effective Life Skills programme. They have also completed 4 of the 8 modules for their Bronze and Silver Awards. They have excellent opportunities for work experience and work-related learning is now highly effective in preparing pupils extremely well for the next stage of learning. As a result, nearly all pupils leave the Centre to enter full-time employment, education and training.

The Centre's outstanding curriculum also includes an extremely well thought out accredited 'Preparation For Life' programme and a highly effective programme of personal social and health education which makes a significant contribution to pupils' excellent spiritual, moral,

social and cultural development. For example pupils gain an appreciation of other cultures by having the opportunity to talk to Muslim staff about their faith, to study the richness and diversity of world religions and to discuss controversial issues raised in the press in an open honest way. As a result, there are no incidents of racism or bullying in the Centre. During discussion, pupils confirmed that they felt extremely safe because any form of bullying is simply not tolerated and such rare incidents are dealt with extremely effectively. Pupils make outstanding progress in their attendance and behaviour because they receive excellent pastoral care and highly effective guidance and support for their personal development. As a result, they nearly always behave well in lessons and focus on learning. This is confirmed by the Centre's own analysis from pupils' weekly target sheets, which show that nearly all pupils are currently focused on learning in lessons with little or no evidence of disruption. In this way, pupils are not only showing enjoyment of learning but are also making a very good contribution to the community in allowing staff to teach and others to learn. They also make an outstanding contribution to the community by taking responsibility in the Centre. For example, they supervise and organise the development of the allotments where they grow and produce healthy foods for sale and they show the greatest respect for property which is kept in excellent condition with no evidence of vandalism or graffiti anywhere.

The outstanding leadership of the headteacher and senior managers has led to sustained and consistently good improvement since the last inspection. All issues for development since then have been fully addressed and the areas for further development identified in the 2007 Pupil Referral Unit Survey have also been effectively implemented. All staff share the strong and rigorous drive for improvement and use self evaluation extremely well to bring about such improvement. This has been recognised by the local authority in a Self- Evaluating School status. All aspects of the school's work, particularly the quality of teaching and its impact on pupils' progress, are rigorously monitored. As a result, the Centre has an outstanding capacity to improve. However, the school's Self Evaluation Form (SEF) does not always fully reflect the current high quality of provision for teaching, the curriculum and pupil progress as current data is not sufficiently refined or analysed and consistently recorded. This means that stakeholders do not always have an objectively valid and reliable picture of the true quality of the Centre's work. For example, the Centre's own analysis of teaching during the last academic year shows that 18 out of 25 lessons seen were outstanding and the remainder were good. This is wholly consistent with the Centre's data on the outstanding academic progress pupils are making, but not entirely consistent with the good achievement and good teaching indicated in the SEF.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make the Self Evaluation Form a more concise working document by refining the analysis of all data to give a clearer picture of the most significant strengths and relative areas for improvement across the provision.

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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?	1
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	1

Achievement and standards

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

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	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1
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?	1
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	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
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	1
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

12 March 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Dacorum Education Support Centre, Hemel Hemstead, HP2 4HS

Thank you for making me feel so welcome when I visited your Centre, which I think is excellent. I was very pleased to see the outstanding progress you are now making in your learning and how well you are all doing. Thank you for telling me about the work of the Centre. Here are more things which I found out about the Centre:

- You are all making outstanding progress in your attendance and behaviour and this helps you to focus on learning. You also show respect for one another and for the staff and you are polite and courteous to visitors.
- You told me that you now enjoy learning and want to do well in your examinations.
- The Centre provides you with a opportunities to gain a wide range of qualifications and prepares you extremely well for when you leave or go back to mainstream schools.
- Teaching is excellent and all staff help you to achieve so much so quickly, that you are all gaining lots of qualifications before you leave.
- Staff from the outreach service who work in mainstream schools are doing a great job too by helping you to return successfully to mainstream schools.
- Your centre is extremely well run and all the staff work as a strong team to do their very best for you. They all care for you extremely well and give you excellent guidance to improve your behaviour and learning.

I think they should write down all the excellent things about their work and things which they want to make even better, so that everyone really knows how good your Centre is.

I can see why your parents and carers are so proud of you now. So keep up the good behaviour and attendance and continue to do your very best.

Good luck in your examinations and best wishes for the future.

Declan McCarthy

Additional inspector