

REACH

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	133178
Local Authority	Stoke-On-Trent
Inspection number	316044
Inspection dates	26–27 February 2008
Reporting inspector	Janet Thompson HMI

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	12–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	40
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ruth Poppleton
Headteacher	Lorna Matley
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Willeton Street Bucknall Stoke on Trent ST2 9JA
Telephone number	01782 235751
Fax number	01782 233332

Age group	12-16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors.

Description of the school

REACH provides education for students from across the city of Stoke-on-Trent who are at risk of exclusion from schools or who require provision different from that available in mainstream schools in Year 11. There is also an outreach service to mainstream schools. The vast majority of students are from White British backgrounds. In Key Stage 3, over 70% receive free school meals but at Key Stage 4 this proportion is considerably lower at approximately 20%. Pupils can attend REACH part-time or full-time. At Key Stage 3, provision is based around a core offer of six weeks' provision at the centre with a six-week transition period back into mainstream school. At Key Stage 4, students access packages usually for longer periods and these are planned to give effective transition to the next stage of education, employment or training. All packages are flexible to meet the needs of the individual. At the time of the inspection, just over half the students accessing the service had some form of learning difficulty and/or disability.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

REACH is providing a good quality of education with outstanding care, guidance and support. Staff create a caring learning environment based on a determination to challenge and expect the best from the students whilst being highly sensitive to their needs. Rigorous monitoring and evaluation underpin an effective team ethos within which challenge and support are both welcomed. Creative curriculum packages build upon students' strengths while making sure areas of difficulty or missed learning are also addressed. This good quality personalised learning and very effective individualised care and guidance leads to good progress for students. There is no discernable difference across the provision between students from different ethnic backgrounds or those who are entitled to free school meals at Key Stage 3. In Key Stage 4 the few who do have free school meals are all making extremely good progress. The changes in admissions from the start of this academic year have presented more of a challenge to the curriculum offer, particularly at Key Stage 3. The curriculum is good, however it does not yet focus enough on providing a rolling programme for six-week placements where reintegration to mainstream school is the aim.

Good teaching builds on the rigorous assessment carried out when students start their placements, be it part-time, full-time or as part of the outreach programme. This and detailed ongoing assessment lead learning and help staff establish good, challenging targets for each individual. Occasionally in lessons teachers are not responsive enough to the students' levels of understanding and continue to focus too inflexibly on course content. Assessment includes social and emotional development. While students are fully involved in developing their individual 'behaviour for learning' targets they are insufficiently involved in the regular evaluation of progress against these. REACH is good at re-engaging young people who are disillusioned with the usual education routes. Helping students to develop skills and strategies for undertaking personal and social responsibility underpins everything the provision does. This helps them stay safe. As a result, students make good progress in their personal development and well-being, particularly in their behaviour and attendance. Their spiritual, moral and social development is good, but opportunities for cultural development are not as effective.

The staff are very consistent in their approach to working with the young people and are always polite and respectful. This is valued by students and they report that this is one of the most important features of the provision and why they make good progress. In return, students treat adults and each other in the same respectful way. Many students have complex problems and a history of interrupted education. Leaders have cleverly established highly effective partnership work. Professionals with backgrounds in health, education and social care work in true partnership, providing students with the chance to address their social and emotional needs while making progress academically. The outreach service is well regarded by local schools. The support for students and simultaneous training for staff help build capacity in mainstream schools.

Excellent leadership by the headteacher and local authority officer with line management responsibility has established a new pupil referral unit (PRU) service that effectively meets the needs of students and supports schools in developing their own expertise. From a difficult starting point of amalgamating two provisions, one of which was in special measures, progress made has been extremely good. The recent appointment of a teacher in charge of the Key Stage 3 site has added to the capacity for the service to grow from strength to strength.

What the school should do to improve further

- Involve students in evaluating their own progress against 'behaviour for learning' targets more regularly.
- Develop the curriculum to reflect a six-week cycle at Key Stage 3 so priorities are clear to students, staff and mainstream schools, and ensure opportunities for cultural development are mapped across both key stages.
- Make sure all teaching is sufficiently responsive to the students' understanding so that learning leads the lesson more than course coverage.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students make good progress from low starting points. At Key Stage 3, students attend for short-term placements. The focus is primarily on social, emotional and behavioural aspects. This helps to ensure they have the skills to engage in learning, but not at the cost of academic progress. Rigorous assessment procedures indicate the gaps students have in their knowledge and skills, and these are targeted effectively, especially in English and mathematics; as a result, progress made is good.

At Key Stage 4, students are working towards accreditation and qualifications that are carefully matched to their interests and aspirations for the future. The range of subjects is wide and progress across the varied courses is good. All students are working well towards achieving good results in core curricular areas and are gaining the levels of literacy and numeracy required for the next stage in their education, employment or training. High expectations enable many students who were previously unlikely to gain accreditation at GCSE to gain grades between A* and G. All students last year achieved at least one GCSE and most achieved three or more. Last academic year Key Stage 3 students were on longer term placements and all students made some progress. The vast majority achieved at least one level higher than before and many gained two. Leavers all moved on to a placement for education, employment or training and the vast majority have experienced continued success in these placements.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students respond well to the clear guidance about acceptable behaviour, and they rise to the high expectations. The social and moral base upon which this is taught is explicit and well defined. As a result, students make good progress in social skills and many are transferring these effectively to other situations.

Very detailed behaviour tracking demonstrates the significant progress students make in these skills. Both part-time and full-time students make good progress because the admissions arrangements successfully identify the right levels of intervention required. Similarly, students accessing the outreach service make good and at times very good progress, thus increasing their involvement with learning in mainstream schools. During the inspection, the behaviour of Key Stage 4 students was exemplary. In Key Stage 3, behaviour was generally good but at times students found it difficult to meet the high expectations. Those involved in this low level disruptive behaviour responded well to the agreed strategies used by staff and quickly resumed their learning. Students develop a good sense of responsibility and accept the consequences of their actions. The work around helping to develop empathy has obvious impact in the way students relate to others.

Significant improvements, often from very low starting points, in attendance make a good contribution to progress and there are a few students with 100% attendance so far this year. Overall attendance levels are satisfactory. If absences begin to occur, action is quick and nearly all students respond well to this. The role of students in evaluation of the provision is central to the development of the service. Students' views are sought regularly and they appreciate being listened to. They contribute extremely well by giving thoughtful feedback on a variety of issues including rewards and the quality of lessons.

REACH promotes healthy lifestyles and is supported effectively in this by other agencies, including the school nurse and a shared primary health care worker with the child and adolescent mental health service (CAMHS). Many students take difficult decisions and positively improve the way they lead their life. The participation in sport activities is good and because the types of activity are designed to match the interest of students, many continue to access aspects of sport even when they return to mainstream schools.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers have high expectations of students' attitudes to learning and in return students expect high quality lessons. Boundaries between lessons and other times are very clear and behaviour for learning is a key thread running through all lessons, as is academic challenge. Lesson planning is designed to meet the needs of groups with a wide range of age and ability. Teachers are enthusiastic and encouraging, helping students to become actively engaged in their learning and take pride in their work. Expectations of the amount and quality of work are high and encouragement through marking and individual tutorials helps students meet these expectations. Routines and structures to support learning are well rehearsed and effective. Occasionally, teaching is less effective and this is when there is insufficient attention given to the students' understanding and the pace at which the lesson progresses is not suitably adapted.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The way in which individual curricular packages are organised enables students to make significant progress in areas that in Key Stage 4 will lead them on to the next stage and that in Key Stage 3 help them successfully transfer back into mainstream schools. The curriculum exceeds requirements for PRUs but has limited opportunities for cultural development other than in humanities.

The breadth of subjects available at Key Stage 4 is wide because REACH accesses courses from colleges and other schools as well as providing some 'in-house' courses. The students appreciate the curricular package being designed around their own needs and aspirations. Work-related learning is good and a high number of students access successful work experience placements. The current development work at Key Stage 3 to introduce areas of learning and match these to partner secondary schools shows a promising start in establishing an effective six-week rolling programme. For older students, termly residential visits are part of the reward system and students find them motivating. At Key Stage 3, the after-school activities are very popular.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Outstanding communication underpins effective links with parents, students and other professionals. The provision of family learning for Key Stage 3 students is a very good example of the way in which families are engaged. This programme is an asset in helping students make progress within their families as well as at school. The full course has run twice and the outcomes were very positive; parents and students alike made significant progress.

Partnerships to plan admissions focus on the students and what they need and then the provision is developed around this using a range of professionals and educational settings. REACH is becoming a base for a number of professionals. For example, a CAMHS worker is based on site four days a week helping to develop provision that crosses education and health boundaries, thus providing therapeutic input while also maintaining the education required to achieve academically. The highly effective partnerships further enhance the good safeguarding systems within REACH.

Communication with students is excellent. They feel involved in decisions and through exceptionally good and careful guidance from staff they learn to acknowledge the role they have in taking on responsibility for themselves

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

In a short time, the newly organised PRU service is providing good quality provision. Rigorous monitoring of students' academic and social progress leads to effective evaluation and supports the service in making hard decisions about what is the most effective use of resources. Monitoring and quality assurance are key features of what goes on and have ensured that there is a very high level of consistency in the use of systems and policies, for example 'behaviour for learning' assessment and tracking.

A passion for getting the best for every young person is demonstrated by all staff and there is a high level of commitment to continue to improve. Staff other than the headteacher and teacher in charge are taking on a more active role in monitoring and evaluation but this is still in the early stages.

The development and improvement of outreach and transition programmes are based on systematic evaluation from short and long term outcomes. Evaluation always includes the views of students, parents and mainstream schools, as well as assessment information.

The management committee are fully in place under the new regulations. They have been highly supportive in enabling the PRU to develop a service responsive to the needs of the students from the local network of schools. Partner schools are heavily involved in helping to develop admission arrangements, and this has led to successful collaboration.

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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	No
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	3
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	1
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

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	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

28 February 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of REACH, Bucknall, Stoke-on-Trent, ST2 9BZ

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave me when I visited REACH. I appreciated your openness and willingness to talk to me as well as the cups of tea!

REACH is providing you with a good education. Staff have very high expectations of you and treat you with respect. In return, you work hard and behave well, so you make good progress. Most of you attend well and this also helps with your progress. By coordinating all the different people who can help, REACH makes sure you receive the best possible care and guidance, enabling you to achieve your goals for the future.

I know you appreciate being able to have your say about all sorts of things and help REACH improve. I was particularly pleased with your input about the subjects you study at Key Stage 4 and the staff successfully help you access courses that you need. In Key Stage 3, REACH offers interesting work but I have asked staff to make sure it fits better with the six-week cycle of your placements. I have also asked staff to make sure all of you learn more about different cultures, especially to appreciate their richness and variety. As you told me, lessons are usually good and interesting, but I think occasionally in some subjects teachers do not make sure you fully understand everything being covered or stretch you if you have understood quickly. I have asked them to work towards making all lessons good or better.

Honest assessment of your skills helps to make sure you learn well. I am pleased with how much you learn to take on responsibility. The 'behaviour for learning' targets are good and I have asked staff to involve you more regularly with evaluating how well you have achieved against these.

Thank you for your help during the inspection. I wish you all the best for the future and hope you continue to build upon the successes you have had at REACH so far.

Yours sincerely

Janet Thompson Her Majesty's Inspector