

Horizon Centre

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	133572
Local Authority	Warrington
Inspection number	316154
Inspection dates	16–17 September 2008
Reporting inspector	Elizabeth Godman

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 (total)	32
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Sue Fullerton
Headteacher	Mr Michael Frost
Date of previous school inspection	23 May 2006
School address	Horizon House Grappenhall Hall Campus Church Lane Warrington Cheshire WA4 3ES
Telephone number	01925 860249
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Horizon pupil referral unit operates from three sites to provide education for young people aged 11 to 16 from across Warrington. Most who attend have been permanently excluded from mainstream schools or are at risk of being excluded. Almost all of these are boys. Those aged 11 to 13 attend Horizon House and those aged 14 to 16, Horizon Centre. These centres are a few miles apart. A third provision, Horizon Place, is based at a rugby stadium in the centre of Warrington. This centre caters for young people who are mainly girls and have a history of not attending school; for example, due to extreme anxiety. At present, all the young people at Horizon are White British. A small number have a statement of special educational need. The nature of the students' difficulties means they are working below national expectations partly because they have missed considerable periods of schooling. The unit has the Sportsmark Award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Horizon provides a good education. Its leaders are effective and are driving improvement at a rapid rate. Staff work well together as a confident team so that when students arrive at the unit, their attendance improves, they settle quickly and show a clear determination to succeed. For many, given their past histories, this is a considerable achievement. The students' enjoyment of their education is outstanding. This is due partly to the climate of mutual trust, very good pastoral care and the interesting lessons and activities. Spiritual, social, moral and cultural understanding grow extremely well as staff challenge students to broaden their awareness of various cultures and of human differences and similarities. As a result, personal development is good overall; students' behaviour is almost always sensible and responsible and the unit's promotion of community cohesion is outstanding.

Students make good progress in their work so that by the end of Year 11 all gain nationally recognised qualifications in English, mathematics, science and information and communication technology (ICT). In Years 10 and 11, careful guidance and the close match of courses to individuals' needs and talents provide success in academic subjects and in preparation for the world of work. The unit provides qualifications in the key skills of literacy and numeracy, but this is not yet fully developed. Although all groups of students make good progress overall, a small number have gaps in their literacy and numeracy skills and do not catch up as quickly as they could.

Teaching is consistently good across the unit and occasionally it is outstanding. Lessons are characterised by good relationships and humour. Although the atmosphere is informal, there is a strong sense of mutual respect. Students are often challenged to think in depth about issues; for example, in relation to disability or race. Activities are consistently well planned and all students are encouraged to do their best. As a result, students gain a sense of achievement and make good progress. Practical activities are especially popular and technology is used well to support learning. The good curriculum allows the study of a full range of subjects and is enriched by visits to places of interest, residential stays and visitors to the unit. Where teaching is outstanding, there are opportunities for students to put forward their own hypotheses, to make links and to review what they have learned. On occasions, lessons curtail the opportunities for students to evaluate their learning. Although academic progress is tracked, inconsistency in the use of assessment means students are sometimes unclear as to how to improve their work.

Senior leaders have an accurate understanding of the unit's strengths and areas for improvement and are judicious in their choice of priorities for improvement. They are highly motivated to offer the best possible provision for the young people of Warrington. This, along with the improvements made to date, gives the unit good capacity to improve and means that it provides good value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the literacy and numeracy skills of those students who experience particular difficulties in these subjects.
- Ensure consistency in the guidance given to students so that all are clear about how their work can be improved.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement and standards have improved since the last inspection and all students now leave Year 11 with recognised qualifications in English, mathematics, science and ICT. A strong emphasis on ensuring that students follow courses suitable for their individual needs in Years 10 and 11 allows them to gain qualifications in a variety of subjects, including physical education (PE), textiles and statistics or in work-related fields such as construction and engineering. The unit has started to provide a qualification in literacy and numeracy which is at an early stage of development. Given their different starting points, all groups of learners make good progress overall in the subjects they study and boys and girls achieve equally well. However, the small number of students who have persistent difficulties with literacy and numeracy are not catching up quite as quickly as they could.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students' enjoyment of their education is outstanding as a result of the great gains in motivation and the very positive attitudes to learning which are established as soon as they join the unit. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding, as students try new experiences and question their own attitudes. For example, in a Year 9 lesson on the African slave trade, they recognised the achievements of African Americans, the richness of African culture and how the wealth of Liverpool was linked to this trade. During a discussion on athletes with disabilities, students showed an extremely clear understanding of equality and a positive appreciation of human differences. Overall, attendance is at a satisfactory level and rising, although this masks the vast improvements in attendance of many individuals with a prior history of rarely going to school at all. Students increasingly understand the importance of good attendance for their learning and say they are eager to come to the unit because they 'love it here'. They understand the importance of being healthy and staying healthy. Their behaviour is good and they recognise their responsibilities to the unit's community. The positive attitudes and the strong social skills which many of the students show prepare them well for continuing education or for work. However, for a small number of students, their preparation for the future is affected by their weaker literacy and numeracy skills.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching is consistently good across the unit and on occasions it is outstanding. Teaching is characterised by positive relationships which secure good behaviour and attitudes to work. Well-planned activities and a good pace enable students to make good progress in their learning. Technology is used well to enliven lessons, for example with film clips, music and use of the internet. Students particularly appreciate the opportunities to work on a laptop or personal computer. Practical activities also capture their imagination and help them to understand the purpose of the lesson. For example, in an outstanding biology lesson they responded very maturely when dissecting a chicken wing, made links to earlier lessons about joints and skeletons and put forward their own hypotheses about the functions of different wing parts. At the end of the lesson they successfully reviewed what they had learned. On occasions, adults dominate

discussion a little too much which results in students missing opportunities to review their work and to understand how to improve it.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The unit provides a good curriculum. Students in Years 7, 8 and 9 follow all the subjects of the National Curriculum. Although there are no specialist rooms for science and design and technology and very limited space for PE, these subjects are taught well due to the resourcefulness of staff who provide varied materials or use the facilities on another site. The curriculum successfully promotes personal and social development equally well for boys and girls and is permeated by attention to being healthy, staying safe and making a positive contribution to the community within the unit and more widely. The curriculum is enriched by visits and visitors and widens students' understanding of their immediate locality and the wider world, promoting community cohesion exceptionally well. In Years 10 and 11, carefully selected courses closely match individuals' talents and interests. Programmes to assist the progress of the minority who find literacy and numeracy difficult are less well developed throughout the unit.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The pastoral care of students is very good. The strong commitment of all staff secures students' enjoyment and promotes health and safety effectively. This supportive environment helps students to grow in confidence and motivation. Staff are also highly sensitive in responding to those experiencing personal difficulties in their lives whether in or outside of school. Good support from Connexions assists the unit in guiding choices and aiding smooth transition when students leave at age 16. Although students' academic progress is checked thoroughly, the guidance then given to students in how to improve their learning is not quite as effective as it could be.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The leadership team is effective and has secured the confidence and commitment of staff and students. Accurate evaluation of the unit's work has rapidly improved teaching and learning since the last inspection. As a result, students achieve consistently well. Leaders and managers ensure continuous improvement. The management committee discharges its responsibilities effectively and plays a key role in sustaining improvement. Parents are highly supportive of the work of the unit and comment upon the positive changes in their child since attending. A key feature of the leadership is the firm commitment to ensuring equality and to respecting diversity. Consequently, the unit promotes community cohesion exceptionally well and makes strong partnerships with a range of schools, services and agencies in the interests of the students. Arrangements for safeguarding are secure. These strengths mean that most students are very happy to attend. However, leaders and managers recognise there is even more to do to help students look beyond their time at Horizons. They have begun to work on ensuring that students have a swifter and more successful return to mainstream education.

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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?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
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
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	3
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 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

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 eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Thank you for the help you gave me when I came to inspect your unit recently. I was impressed by the way you were prepared to speak openly with me about your work and I found you polite and friendly at all times.

Horizons is giving you a good education. Many of you told me how very much you enjoy the lessons and other activities and how it has improved your interest and attitudes to learning. I thought that your understanding of different cultures within and beyond Britain was outstanding and it was particularly good to see how you were prepared to change your views about things as you gained more information. This and your mature social skills will prepare you well for the future.

I found that all of you made good progress because of the good teaching you receive. It is also good that all of you gain nationally recognised qualifications by the end of Year 11 and that your teachers are providing you with courses to meet your personal needs and interests. You learn particularly quickly in practical lessons and when you use laptops and other technology. You told me how much you enjoy the visits and residential and how these helped you achieve things you had thought impossible, such as going to Manchester by train or riding the surf in Cornwall.

Your headteacher and his team have done much to improve the unit for you and they have good ideas about what to do next to make it even better. I have asked the staff to do two things to improve the unit:

- help those of you who find literacy and numeracy difficult to improve your skills in these subjects
- give you more opportunities to assess how well you are doing and make all assessments clearer so that you know what you have to do to improve your work.

I feel sure that you will take up the challenge to do even better and wish you every success for the future during your time at and after Horizons.