

# New River College Key Stage 4 Pupil Referral Unit

Inspection report

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|--------------------------------|------------------|
| <b>Unique Reference Number</b> | 100391           |
| <b>Local Authority</b>         | Islington        |
| <b>Inspection number</b>       | 323268           |
| <b>Inspection dates</b>        | 7–8 July 2009    |
| <b>Reporting inspector</b>     | John Kennedy HMI |

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>                | 14–16   |
| <b>Gender of pupils</b>                   | Mixed   |
| <b>Number on roll</b>                     |   |
| School (total)                            | 110   |
| <b>Appropriate authority</b>              | The local authority   |
| <b>Headteacher</b>                        | Ms Jan Culley   |
| <b>Date of previous school inspection</b> | 20 March 2007   |
| <b>School address</b>                     | White Lion Centre<br>White Lion Street<br>Islington<br>London<br>N1 9PW |
| <b>Telephone number</b>                   | 020 7527 7011   |
| <b>Fax number</b>                         | 020 7527 5027   |

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|--------------------------|---------------|
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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an Additional Inspector.

## Description of the school

The New River College Key Stage 4 Pupil Referral Unit, formerly known as Project 16, is part of New River College, the local authority's overarching provision for pupil referral units. The pupil referral unit at the White Lion Centre, referred to in this report as 'the centre', provides full-time education for up to 36 students who either have been permanently excluded from school, are not on the roll of a school or have transferred from the Key Stage 3 provision. New River College currently contracts six other providers to offer alternative education for almost two thirds of the students on roll at the centre. There are 57 students who have been deregistered from mainstream schools and, although now registered at the centre, have been receiving education from one of these commissioned providers since January 2009. The centre also provides for a very small minority of students who, because they arrive in the area late in Year 11, are not on a school roll.

The majority of students at the centre are males. Students come from a range of ethnic heritages and almost half are White British. A small group of students comes from backgrounds where English is not the home language. Most students are resident in Islington and have attended local schools. All those attending the centre have learning difficulties and/or disabilities and a very small minority have a statement of special educational need. The highest proportion have behavioural, emotional or social needs. Many students also experience significant barriers to learning because of their literacy and language needs. A small minority are known to the youth offending service. An interim head of centre took up post in September 2008 and was appointed to the substantive post in January 2009. At its last inspection in March 2007, the centre was removed from special measures. The centre was awarded National Healthy School Status in March 2009.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

New River College is successful in providing a good quality of education and care to students at Key Stage 4. It is also rapidly improving and this can be most clearly seen in the quality of teaching and learning and in its leadership and management. One of the strengths of the centre is its emphasis on ensuring that it reaches out to the young people in its care, and also to supporting and working with parents and carers. One parent, in four words summed up the ethos of the centre, 'You never give up.' Staff work tirelessly, and make the most of their partnership with other agencies, to give every student as many chances as they need to be successful. In doing so, they help students regain lost confidence and motivation and give them the skills and knowledge they need to get back on track. The aims of the college are summed up in the words of the head of centre, 'The secret of our success is our deep belief that all of our young people can achieve, whatever barriers they have experienced.' Inspectors saw clear evidence of this at work.

Students start at the centre with significant gaps in their learning, often caused by disrupted education or personal circumstances and attitudes that make it difficult for them to be successful learners. The centre is effective in helping them overcome these problems. Positive relationships between staff and students underpin the centre's success. The adults are skilful in their teaching, which helps the students make good progress. Staff are equally sensitive in their personalised care and support and this boosts students' self-esteem. Despite the fact that levels of attainment remain very low for some students, they leave the centre much better equipped to succeed than when they started. Students make good progress in their learning and many make substantial gains from very low starting points. Students benefit from a tailored curriculum, whether this is at the centre or with one of the providers that the college commissions.

The steps that many students need to take to make up for lost time, overcome obstacles and change patterns of previous behaviour are enormous. Students, particularly those who have been longer at the centre, make up for lost time in their learning and, at the same time, improve their behaviour and attitudes. Many improve considerably on non-existent or exceptionally low levels of school attendance. However, despite these improvements and the best efforts of the staff, attendance remains too low and, because of this, students do not make the most of the good teaching and curriculum on offer at the centre and with other providers.

The executive head and the head of centre provide very strong leadership and management. They are passionate about ensuring that the centre continues to develop and this is reflected in the steps taken to improve the quality of teaching and learning and the curriculum. Increasingly, staff at all levels are taking more responsibility for the part they play in the drive for continuous improvement. Leaders and managers have a very good understanding of what is needed to develop the centre further. They rightly recognise that, due to the increasing student numbers, there is a growing need to commission other providers. This requires more rigour in monitoring the quality of provision. Leadership and management have brought about significant improvements, particularly in the past year and have laid secure foundations for further developments. They have been successful in addressing the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. The centre has good capacity to continue this improvement.

### What the school should do to improve further

- Improve attendance to a level where all students can make the most of the opportunities that the centre and other providers offer.

- Ensure that robust systems are in place with all providers to enable the centre to monitor and secure positive outcomes for all the students in its care.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 2**

Students arrive at the centre with levels of attainment that are generally exceptionally low. They also have gaps in their learning because of their complex needs, personal circumstances and the fact that, for one reason or another, they have had a fragmented education. Many have had a history of exclusion and exceptionally poor levels of attendance in their previous schools. Because of the good quality of care and education at the centre, almost all students are now back on track to gain at least one GCSE pass and entry-level qualifications in adult literacy and numeracy. Some students are expected to gain five higher-grade GCSEs. This represents significant achievement for them. Almost a quarter of the students gained higher grades in the combination of English, mathematics and science in 2008. This shows an improving trend compared to previous years. Students with the potential to achieve well in particular areas, such as Spanish and French, are provided with personalised support and, consequently, achieve at the very highest levels. Students gain accreditation not only in more academic subjects but also in a wide range of other areas, such as the awards scheme development and accreditation network (ASDAN) and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award.

Levels of attainment are improving but remain very low compared to age-related expectations nationally. Given their starting points, students' achievements represent good progress overall, including for those with a statement of special educational need. A few students make best use of the support of the centre and external agencies and their progress is outstanding. Most importantly, they achieve well in their basic skills and in other personal, social and communication skills. All those who left the centre in 2008 went on to education, training or employment, and similar pathways have been secured for this year's cohort. This is an indicator of the good progress they have made, considering that the majority had little prospect of gaining qualifications before they started. Students make better progress the longer they are at the centre. The progress of some students, particularly those who are in Year 10 and some who are accessing education with alternative providers, has been slower. In some instances, this is also because they continue to have entrenched attendance problems.

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

### **Grade: 3**

The students' personal, moral, cultural and spiritual development is satisfactory overall, which, for many of them, is a significant achievement. Students make good gains, particularly in their social development, basic skills and renewed confidence and motivation, as a result of the good individualised care and support they receive. They leave New River better equipped to be successful in their future career paths. This is reflected also, for example, in their improved sense of responsibility, the contribution they make to the centre and their better behaviour. Occasionally, some struggle with their behaviour, but this is managed well by staff. Instances of exclusion are decreasing. Inspectors saw evidence of good behaviour, for example during the tutor time, and this helped students to make a good start to the day. Students say they feel safe in the centre. Curriculum provision, particularly in personal, social, health and economic education, helps students develop a solid understanding of the importance of making safe and healthy choices, and there are good opportunities to take part in physical exercise. The recent Healthy School Award endorses this. Students' practice in adopting these lifestyles is more

apparent in terms of safe practices. Some, for example, still choose to ignore the dangers of smoking. Students told inspectors that they enjoy their learning and appreciate the second chance they have been given. Overall attendance rates show a marked improvement compared to students' starting points and their entrenched patterns of absence and poor engagement previously. Nevertheless, despite the good systems that are in place, the intervention of a wide range of agencies and an overall improvement in attendance, absence rates still remain too high for students attending the centre and on other courses.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 2**

Teaching and learning have improved greatly in the past year. Inspectors' observations, which were limited owing to Year 11 having finished most of their studies, confirm the centre's own evaluation and students' own views about the quality of teaching and learning. They are good because lessons are cleverly planned and managed, and staff use a wide range of resources and activities to engage the students and keep them on task. Teachers are skilful in asking questions to assess progress and develop the students' understanding. Teaching assistants and teachers pay constant attention to the pace of progress and engagement and show careful regard to individual needs and circumstances. Planning is closely linked with students' individual plans and assessment data. Teachers help students see how they can make progress and how this is related to examination criteria. Inspectors observed two visiting speakers making an impressive contribution to the Year 9 transition programme that was taking place during the inspection. In one lesson, students were taught how to use rap to develop their understanding of poetry. In another lesson, they were held in captive engagement as they were helped to reflect on the impact that their attitudes and emotions have in their lives. The centre has correctly identified that there is more that teachers can do to increase students' opportunities for self- and peer assessment and make some lessons more creative and dynamic to motivate the students and hold their interest.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

#### **Grade: 2**

The centre, and its commissioned providers, enable students to access a good full-time curriculum that is broad and flexible enough to meet their needs and interests. Core subjects and basic skills are delivered effectively and the centre uses its resources to provide considerable personalisation in delivering the curriculum. The introduction of adult literacy and numeracy has enhanced the provision and this contributes well to students' economic well-being. Targeted students benefit greatly from the centre's ability to source additional support and provision, enabling, for instance, some of them to achieve very highly in modern foreign languages. The three-week transition programme for Year 9 students, which was under way during the inspection, is skilfully planned and gives these students an excellent start to Key Stage 4. The range of alternative providers which the centre commissions enable students to have a good balance of academic and vocational subjects, which are tailored to meet their needs. Teachers are making better use of information and communication technology across the curriculum to enrich the quality of teaching and learning. Curriculum planning has been thorough and the centre has put in place a broader range of options from September 2009. Work experience opportunities are available to Year 10 students, although the range is limited.

## Care, guidance and support

### Grade: 2

The centre provides good support and guidance to the students and ensures that safeguarding procedures are followed. Students receive excellent personalised care and attention and this is exemplified by the fact that staff will provide whatever help is needed to keep students on track. Staff work carefully with students when they start to compile an 'information passport' based on their initial comprehensive assessment of each student's academic and personal needs. This is used effectively to identify the right provision and support for each young person. The centre makes good use of a traffic light system to help adults keep track of the students' subsequent progress and adjust their interventions as required. The centre receives very good support from a wide range of partner agencies, for example, social care, Connexions, the youth offending service and the police. Staff try hard to encourage students to attend more frequently and the centre has good systems in place to follow up absence. However, there remain some instances where providers or other agencies working directly with the young people do not provide timely enough information to help the centre in this aspect of its work. The adults ensure that, when students do attend, they are given every possible help to catch up on any work missed. This is one of the reasons why, despite their erratic attendance, students make good progress. The appointment of a 'team around the child' coordinator has strengthened the centre's provision, ensuring that the right multi-agency action, if required, is taken to meet a student's needs. This can include, for instance, ensuring that they provide support to a young person in court or that very sensitive and specialised help is provided to help a young person with identified mental health needs.

## Leadership and management

### Grade: 2

A shared vision and a common drive for improvement, combined with a highly effective partnership between the executive headteacher of New River College and the head of centre, is one of the principal reasons for the centre's improvement. They set high expectations for staff and ensure that appropriate opportunities are provided for professional development. They set challenging targets to secure improvements at all levels for staff and students alike. Staffing is more stable and there has been a reduction in time lost through staff absence. Staff at all levels take increasing responsibility for their contribution to ensuring that the centre continues to sharpen its practice. This is evident, for instance, in the improved quality of teaching and learning. Planning is sharply focused and is underpinned by a good understanding of the centre's strengths and what it could do better. The centre has systems in place to ensure that the education and care being offered by the range of its providers is having a positive impact, but recognises that this is an area that could be strengthened. The centre's promotion of community cohesion is satisfactory and a safety and cohesion group has been established to look at ways of strengthening the impact that the centre can have on the wider community. The management committee is developing well in its supportive and challenging role. Resources are used by the centre to good effect and, when considered alongside outcomes for its students, this represents good value for money.

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## Annex A

**Inspection judgements**

|  |                       |
|--|-----------------------|
| <b>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</b> | <b>School Overall</b> |
|--|-----------------------|

**Overall effectiveness**

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| <b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b> | 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**

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>How well do learners achieve?</b>   | 2 |
| The standards <sup>1</sup> 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 |

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<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.

## Personal development and well-being

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>                          | 3 |
| The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development                                     | 3 |
| The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles   | 3 |
| The extent to which learners adopt safe practices   | 2 |
| The extent to which learners enjoy their education  | 3 |
| The attendance of learners  | 4 |
| The behaviour of learners   | 3 |
| The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community                                    | 3 |
| How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being | 3 |

## The quality of provision

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?</b>       | 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

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| <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 eliminated   | 2   |
| How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?   | 3   |
| 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  | 3   |
| 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**

03 September 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of New River College Key Stage 4 Pupil Referral Unit, London, N1 9PW

Thank you for the welcome and help you gave us when we visited you recently. A special thanks to those Year 11 students who took time out from their work at home to come in to speak to us. We believe that New River College provides you with good care and education. Many of you have had difficult experiences in your previous schools and some of you continue to face obstacles in your lives. The staff are very skilled at supporting you in every way. You have good teachers and the curriculum gives you a wide range of subjects that help you to do well.

You have succeeded in making good progress in your learning and you are becoming mature and responsible young people. You deserve the credit for this, but so do the staff who have helped you get back on track and, as you said, have given you, 'a second chance'. You spoke to us about the positive changes you have noticed, especially in the past year, and we can see that one of the reasons for this is the leadership of the head of centre. She does not work on her own. The other staff work with her and support her in continuing to make the centre a better place.

Many of you left your last school in January and, instead of going to the centre, you have been attending other colleges. We also met with some of you. You spoke highly of the help and support you receive from teachers and others, such as your Connexions adviser. One of the things we have asked the centre to do is to keep a close eye on how well all of you are doing, whether you attend the White Lion centre or are at a college, to make sure that you do as well as you can. Many of you came to the centre or to college with a history of very poor attendance and some of you had stopped attending school altogether. You have done well to improve your attendance but we think you could do more. You are lucky to have such skilful and caring teachers and other staff. However, if you are not attending, you cannot make the most of the second chance you are being given.

Some of you may have left by the time you read this letter and we would like to wish you well in your future lives. We know that the centre has worked hard to make sure that you have a place at college, follow other training or have a job. We hope that you will continue to be successful in all that you do.

Yours faithfully

John Kennedy

Her Majesty's Inspector