

First Base

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	131822
Local Authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	328647
Inspection date	19 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Alan Lemon

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Pupil referral unit
School category	Pupil referral unit
Age range of pupils	3–8
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	14
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Headteacher	Mrs Annette Moxon
Date of previous school inspection	22 March 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	34 Ashley Downs Lowestoft Suffolk NR32 4EX
Telephone number	01502 512963
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Age group	3–8
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

The inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues:

- the robustness of assessment in providing accurate measures of pupils' progress
- the evidence of whole-school targets and the progress made towards achieving them
- the contribution to pupils' progress of the links with parents and with pupils' mainstream schools.

Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but where inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Evidence was gathered from the observation of lessons. In addition, discussions were held with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, members of the management committee, parents, schools and representatives of support agencies. Other evidence considered included school data on standards and progress, policies and other school documents, external reports on the school's work and parents' questionnaires.

Description of the school

First Base provides support and education to boys and girls in north Suffolk who are not making a successful start in an early years setting or school. Pupils have behavioural, emotional and social difficulties and related learning difficulties such as an attention deficit hyperactive disorder, autism, dyslexia and problems with communication. None of the 14 pupils on roll has a statement of special educational needs, although seven are undergoing statutory assessments. All of the pupils are boys. Many live in areas of severe economic and social deprivation. Attainment on entry to First Base varies between pupils but is often below the level expected for their age. First Base supports pupils for up to three terms. Pupils living within a 15 mile radius of Lowestoft can attend the school for one or two days a week while continuing to attend their early years setting or mainstream school. Pupils beyond the 15 mile radius are supported by the First Base Behaviour Support Service. This is managed by the mainstream schools served by First Base, and also performs a wider role of supporting 117 pupils in schools who present challenging behaviour. Training is also provided to schools and parents to improve their capacity to manage challenging behaviour. It is rare for children below school age to attend First Base as these children are supported in their early years settings. The school maintains Early Years Foundation Stage provision to support its work with children in early years settings. First Base is recognised as Investors in People. It has the Healthy School Award and the Basic Skills Quality Mark.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

First Base is an outstanding school. It was judged to be outstanding at its previous Ofsted inspection. It has been extremely successful in maintaining the very high quality of its provision for pupils, their families and schools. Since the last inspection it has built on its substantial success by making many improvements that have further increased its effectiveness. Above all of its many strengths, its network of support around pupils stands out. The school works exceptionally well in partnership with others to support pupils who are vulnerable and at risk of being excluded from their mainstream school. Within this remit, First Base makes an exceptional contribution to promoting community cohesion. The parents of pupils who attend First Base for lessons are entirely full of praise, commenting for example, 'They have been an amazing support to me and my son and my child's behaviour and confidence have improved 100%.' Schools and support agencies are unanimous in their praise saying, 'They are instrumental in working with parents and getting parents onboard,' and, 'The expertise that they bring to a mainstream school enhances the support that we can give to our most challenging pupils.' Many different professionals including mental health workers, educational psychologists and social workers see First Base as a very effective partner in the multi-agency support for parents and their children. This means that the care and support for pupils is outstanding as it concentrates most effectively on developing their well-being in school, at home and in the community. All the required safeguarding procedures were in place at the time of the inspection.

The leadership and management of First Base is outstanding because the vision of an effective and comprehensive support structure for pupils in difficulty has been accomplished with considerable success. Every pupil has an excellent opportunity to discover the enjoyment of learning and stay in school. The provision at First Base for the most challenging pupils, the support provided in schools for teachers and pupils and the support for parents are each extremely effective. Observers single out the high quality of expertise, commitment, determination and reliability of the headteacher, other leaders and their teams, to explain why First Base is so valued and effective in all aspects of its work. Accurate self-evaluation leads to improvement planning that is sharply focused on pushing the boundaries further to broaden the school's remit. The development worker and family support worker are new roles through which a good start has been made on researching new approaches and resources and further ways to support parents. The school's capacity to improve is excellent. The management committee is kept extremely well informed through the headteacher's regular reports and its direct involvement in monitoring the school. The committee's substantial experience and expertise ensures it fulfils all of its duties and supports the school in maintaining the high quality of its work.

Pupils' achievement is outstanding, most particularly with regard to returning successfully to their mainstream school and, for pupils supported in their own school, maintaining their places. The majority of pupils who have attended First Base have maintained their mainstream school placement and the beneficial impact of interventions has been long lasting. In achieving this, pupils make rapid progress in improving their basic skills, behaviour, self-confidence and self-esteem. All of this, encouraged by extremely effective teaching, means pupils with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties and the pupils with an attention deficit hyperactive disorder enjoy and have positive attitudes to learning. While the standards of pupils' work in First Base starts out below or well below average, as a result of their progress, it is often just below or broadly average in lessons. Pupils who have particular difficulties with communication

and literacy make good progress in linking sounds and letters, reading and writing. Consequently they are extremely well prepared for the future.

The impressive progress made by pupils in their social skills leads to outstanding personal development. Pupils' personal, social and emotional development are often much lower than that expected for their age. However, the very active promotion of pupils' independence and social interaction means they start taking responsibility, act self-sufficiently, co-operate in group activities and relate considerately to others. Pupils are enabled to contribute in significant ways in school, and they raise money each year for charity. Pupils' attendance is very good. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. The success they experience brings pupils a great deal of enjoyment of school which encourages a positive outlook and greater efforts. In the school's very effective approaches to meeting pupils' needs, considerable emphasis is given to promoting a healthy lifestyle and staying safe. Themes of physical and emotional well-being permeate curriculum topics. Pupils find out about a wide range of foods and know about risks and dangers. The current topic on Norway has introduced some aspects of a Nordic diet, Norwegian language and customs. This fits into the very good cultural provision, which also includes strong emphasis on developing pupils' awareness of the different cultures and faiths found in Britain. The outstanding range of activities for pupils creates a curriculum which stimulates their interest and engagement as it places essential emphasis on, and gives a sharp focus to, developing their basic skills and personal development.

Teaching and learning in First Base are outstanding mainly because the good number of adults in the classroom work extremely effectively to promote learning. Lessons are lively, enjoyable and the pace of learning is brisk. Adults manage pupils' behaviour exceptionally well using praise, rewards and sanctions. The teacher and her assistants set high expectations, particularly around the development and use of good social skills and problem-solving behaviour. If two pupils have a disagreement they are helped to resolve it together. Very well planned lessons capture pupils' interest and hold their attention. Teaching methods engage pupils by using lots of visual resources such as the interactive whiteboard, and practical activities where exploration, discovery and interaction are important. Pupils contribute actively, for example making good efforts to link letters and sounds or listing the properties of different shapes. Assessment is extremely thorough, especially when used to identify targets for pupils and to plan their work. Academic support and guidance are very strong. Pupils' progress in lessons and towards their targets is regularly measured and reviewed leading to a constantly sharp focus on improving their knowledge and skills.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Exceptionally strong leadership and management ensure that First Base provides the same outstanding support for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage as it does for pupils in Years 1 and 2. This is almost entirely provided in children's own early years settings. The commitment to children's welfare and development from First Base staff is extremely strong. They gather very detailed information about each child's needs through a rigorous assessment process, consultation with parents and, where it is the case, from all of the professionals involved. An effective collaborative approach is firmly established at an early stage. Consequently, the priorities for each child are quickly determined, shared and agreed. Children's progress is promoted very effectively as a result of the contribution made by First Base to children improving their behaviour and developing the skills and confidence to learn.

On the rare occasions a child in the Early Years Foundation Stage attends First Base, activities are planned that provide plenty of appropriate opportunities for them to be active and fully involved in learning. A key strength is the extent to which staff respond flexibly to each child, valuing their individuality, identifying their strengths and promoting their skills. A scrutiny of past work shows children taking part in structured learning activities, balanced well with many good open-ended activities indoors and outdoors. They explore and experiment with enjoyment such as beginning to write by carefully pouring water in the shape of letters onto the playground. Planning shows that activities are extremely carefully selected which promote work and cover all the areas of learning. This contributes to children's highly successful transition into Year 1 in mainstream schools.

What the school should do to improve further

- Support the development worker's and the family support workers' projects with regular and rigorous monitoring and evaluation of their initiatives.

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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

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	1
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	1
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	1
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	1
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	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/or disabilities make progress	1

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?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	1
The behaviour of learners	1
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 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

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 eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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	1
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**

20 March 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of First Base, Lowestoft, NR32 4EX

We really enjoyed our visit to First Base as you were all very friendly and helpful. We wanted to find out how good First Base is in helping you to stay in your own school and in helping you to learn. We think First Base is outstanding in the ways it is supporting you. Your excellent behaviour and efforts with your work have also helped make First base as good as it is.

I am very pleased to say that all of the staff at First Base work very hard and they are making sure you make excellent progress. First Base is outstanding because it makes it possible for you all to really enjoy school and find success. This means that in the short time you attend school in First Base you are making fast progress in learning to read, write, count and to get along with each other much better.

Not only do the staff help you in First Base but they also do just as good a job helping pupils in other schools. First Base works really well with your school and your parents and this goes a long way to making sure you get the best from school. You are doing very well in learning important lessons about a healthy life style and staying safe.

The staff are expert at doing their jobs and they make sure First Base is always improving. Mrs Moxon has thought of some new jobs for staff to make First base even better. These should help bring new ideas to First Base to improve your activities and the links between the school and your parents. I have asked Mrs Moxon to keep a close eye on this and to make sure this succeeds.

I wish you all the very best for the future.

Alan Lemon

Lead inspector