

# The Oaktree Centre

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	134328
<b>Local Authority</b>	Middlesbrough
<b>Inspection number</b>	328891
<b>Inspection date</b>	25 November 2008
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Alastair Younger

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>	5–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School (total)	8
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The local authority
<b>Headteacher</b>	Leanne Chilton (teacher in charge)
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	1 March 2006
<b>School address</b>	First Floor Whinney Banks School Fakenham Avenue Middlesbrough TS5 4QQ
<b>Telephone number</b>	01642 828547
<b>Fax number</b>	01642 354366

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

## Description of the school

This is a very small pupil referral unit. Pupils are referred to it when they are identified as being at risk of permanent exclusion from their mainstream schools. All of the pupils currently attending are boys in Key Stage 2. The unit provides short-term placements on a part time basis for six to eight weeks.

Day-to-day management is the responsibility of the teacher in charge. A named member of the local authority is the appropriate authority but management decisions rest with the management board.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

This is a good pupil referral unit. It has been very successful in eliminating any need for the permanent exclusion of primary school pupils in Middlesbrough over the past two years. The teacher in charge leads the unit with supreme efficiency on a day-to-day basis. This has ensured improvement since the previous inspection. Thorough and perceptive analysis of what the unit does well, and what could be improved, has paved the way for future improvement. The effectiveness of this self-evaluation is tempered by the fact that members of the Management Board are not yet doing enough to find out for themselves what happens in the unit, challenging management decisions or evaluating their effectiveness. Excellent working relationships between unit staff, parents, a local special school and the cluster of primary schools with which the unit works, ensure that pupils are given excellent care, support and guidance to help them make the progress necessary for their successful return to school.

Parents are unanimous in their support of the unit. Every parent responded to a questionnaire sent out before the inspection and not one had anything but praise for the work it does and the changes it is bringing about in their children. Most importantly, parents feel that their children are safe and happy and are making good progress as a result of good teaching. There is no questioning that the unit is strongly promoting better futures for its pupils.

Observation of teaching during the inspection showed that parents are justified in their belief. Good teaching results in pupils making good progress. Teachers vary tasks well so that pupils never become bored or disruptive but occasionally miss opportunities to allow pupils to work cooperatively or to work individually and with greater independence.

Pupils thrive in the unit. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development comes on in leaps and bounds. Pupils make excellent progress in improving their attendance. Every pupil over the past year has improved his attendance in comparison with that at previous schools. Behaviour is good, not least because teachers provide pupils with interesting and varied tasks which prevent pupils' attention from straying. Healthy lifestyles are strongly promoted but outcomes are limited by accommodation, which gives them few opportunities to participate in physical activity.

The good curriculum is firmly founded on the 'Every Child Matters' agenda. This ensures that pupils gain enjoyment from it, achieve well, learn how to stay safe and live healthy lifestyles. They have a good understanding of how to live in a community and that this includes help and respecting each other. These skills enable them to secure better futures for themselves and make positive contribution to the community.

### What the school should do to improve further

- Create more opportunities for pupils to work cooperatively and with more independence
- Encourage the Management Board to play a stronger role in evaluating the effectiveness of initiatives.

## Achievement and standards

### Grade: 2

Achievement is good. Because of attendance and behaviour issues, most pupils have seriously underperformed in previous settings with the result that their attainment on entry is often well below what they are capable of. In the short period of time pupils spend in the unit, this shortfall

is not made up but good progress is very evident as a result of good teaching. This good progress is as much about pupils' personal development as their academic learning and teachers respect the importance of both. Progress is largely measured by gains in what pupils know, understand and can do. Records confirm that pupils not only make good gains in these respects but that they also fill in gaps in their knowledge, often caused by exclusions or non-attendance at previous schools. It is not appropriate to compare their attainment with national standards because of the students' learning difficulties and/or disabilities. However, pupils' work shows that they are making good progress in improving their basic skills in literacy, numeracy and using computers. They are also gaining a good understanding of how their bodies work, which contributes to their understanding of how to live healthily. The good progress they make in geography is helping them to understand their place in the global community.

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

### **Grade: 2**

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. For many pupils, this is the first setting in which they have achieved well and consequently enjoyed attending. Reflecting this is the fact that every pupil in recent years has improved on their attendance in previous schools. The unit achieves exceptionally high attendance for pupils attending a referral unit. Pupils behave well, partly because they are fully occupied with interesting and challenging activities but also because they are well supervised. They learn that by controlling their impulses and anger they can enjoy themselves more, be more welcomed by others and be more integrated into society. In the unit they appreciate the total absence of bullying and freedom from verbal or physical abuse and this helps to create the harmonious atmosphere in which they thrive. Through their studies in geography and citizenship lessons, pupils learn about how people outside their own society live and that, although their beliefs and habits may differ from their own there is much they can learn from other cultures. In combination, the progress pupils make in acquiring basic skills and becoming more sociable paves the way for future success in life.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 2**

Teaching and learning are good. Staff share trusting and productive relationships with pupils. Activities in lessons are well matched to individual needs and, equally importantly, to pupils' often limited attention spans. Great care is taken to identify precisely what pupils should learn in each lesson and what needs to be done to bring about this learning. The fact that pupils are challenged and fulfilled is clearly evident in their enthusiasm for learning and their good behaviour. Teachers and support staff are adept at recognising worsening attitudes amongst pupils and act quickly to make sure they do not escalate to the point of disrupting learning. In this respect, behaviour management is outstanding. Whole-class activities fully involve all pupils and allow each to contribute to the full, but lessons do not routinely include planned opportunities for pupils to show how they can work together harmoniously and cooperatively to achieve more. There are insufficient opportunities for pupils to show whether they can work with decreasing levels of support in preparation for returning to school.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

### **Grade: 2**

The good curriculum strongly promotes the acquisition of basic skills. It is innovatively designed around the tenets of the 'Every Child Matters' agenda. Time is used constructively to ensure that pupils gain a wealth of experience across a wide-ranging timetable. Numeracy becomes 'economic well-being; literacy 'enjoy and achieve'; science 'healthy living'; geography, 'contribution to the community'; and, PHSE/citizenship, 'staying safe'. Pupils are particularly well served by this curriculum, which is carefully planned to complement what pupils are learning in their mainstream schools. Weaknesses are very minor and largely unavoidable. Many pupils face relatively long journeys to the unit and back to their schools and this eats into learning time. There are also limited opportunities for pupils to engage in physical activity during their time in the unit. The formation of 'Class 10' in partnership with a nearby special school has ensured that pupils with a statement of special educational need maintain their entitlement of access to the full National Curriculum.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 1**

Pupils receive outstanding care, guidance and support. The unit is a place of peace, safety and fulfilment. This relieves parents and reassures pupils. Care procedures are embedded at the heart of the unit. Safeguarding procedures meet requirements. Great care is taken to make sure that only the most suitable adults work with pupils and that pupils know that if they have any problems they can freely confide in those people. Pupils are kept particularly well-informed about their progress, largely through discussion with staff and marking of work. This is excellent and routinely includes praise for what has been done well and advice about what could be done to improve. Formal assessment procedures are kept simple but precise and allow staff to draw up excellent individual education and care plans for each pupil. Excellent relationships exist between the unit and the many other agencies and professionals who contribute to securing pupils' well-being.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

Leadership and management are good; governance is satisfactory. The teacher in charge provides outstanding leadership of the unit on a day-to-day basis, ensuring that pupils are well educated, well behaved and extremely well cared for. Self-evaluation is precise and well founded and ensures the school has good capacity to improve. However, the Management Board (the equivalent of a school governing body) does not currently contribute enough to the process by challenging management decisions or evaluating their effectiveness.

A major strength of management is a clear understanding about the role the unit is expected to play. Leaders and managers have ensured that placements are short term with an expectation of return to school and they have also, through the 'Class 10' initiative, taken prudent steps to ensure that pupils with a statement of special educational need receive their statutory entitlement.

Contribution to community cohesion is good. There are limited opportunities for the unit to contribute to the local community but good geography and citizenship lessons help pupils to

learn about others who come from different backgrounds or cultures. In this way the unit promotes in pupils the importance of developing a good sense of what they can contribute to the mixed community in which they live.

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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>
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**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?	1
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>	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	1
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

<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?	1

## 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	1
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?	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	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**

26 November 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of The Oaktree Centre, Middlesbrough, TS5 4QQ

I called in the other day to check how you were getting on. Thank you for looking after me and making my visit so enjoyable. I'm sure that you will agree with me that The Oaktree Centre is a really good place for you to be. It's helping you to get sorted out, begin to enjoy learning again and helping you to behave well enough for your schools to want you back.

You are getting on well in class because you are well taught and you are working hard. I could tell that you were enjoying yourselves in lessons. It was good to see that you attend whenever you can and that you now recognise the importance of regular attendance.

Staff are keeping a close eye on you, not just to make sure you are safe but to make sure you are making as much progress as possible. They are giving you a lot of very good advice.

The Oaktree Centre is very well organised and is working very closely with lots of other people, including your parents, to make sure that you get as much help as possible and can look forward to the future.

I talked to your teachers and we agreed that a few small things could make the unit even better. We agreed that you could be given a few more opportunities to work in two's or three's to show that you can help each other to learn. We also thought that sometimes you could work with less support, just to show that you were ready to return to the bigger classes in your schools. In conversation with the chair of the management board we also agreed that members of the board could play a more active part in checking how effectively the unit is working.

So that's it; good luck for the future.

All the best.

Alastair Younger

Lead inspector