

First Base

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	134617
Local Authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	328934
Inspection date	13 January 2009
Reporting inspector	Susan Aldridge

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)	16
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	Ms Judith Bush
Date of previous school inspection	11 January 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	School Lane Brandon Suffolk IP27 0AD
Telephone number	01842 815478
Fax number	01842 819691

Age group	3–8
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors. Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: improvements in the quality of self-evaluation and the role of the management committee, and the quality and evaluation of the outreach service. Evidence was gathered from discussions with the headteacher, representatives of the management committee and staff, representatives of schools supported by outreach staff and parents, lesson observations and an examination of available data and analysis of this.

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

Description of the school

First Base is a pupil referral unit (PRU) that provides support for pupils with a range of behavioural, emotional and social difficulties from the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) to the age of eight. Pupils are referred to the PRU because they are experiencing difficulties in their schools and the PRU aims to prevent their exclusion. Occasionally pupils attending First Base have been permanently excluded from their schools. Although pupils' attainment levels vary, many have knowledge and skills below those expected for their age because of their difficulties and interrupted education. A small number have statements of special educational needs. Pupils come from a wide area of West Suffolk. Those who attend the PRU do so part-time, for up to two days each week for a maximum of one year. For the remainder of each week they attend their mainstream schools or receive home tuition. Some pupils attend the PRU's base while others, including all children in the EYFS, are supported in their mainstream schools by the PRU's outreach service. Most of the pupils are boys and currently all are from White British backgrounds.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

First Base is a good PRU that provides outstanding care for its pupils in a safe and nurturing environment. It contributes to community cohesion well and meets its aims effectively because its work enables pupils to remain in mainstream education with support or return successfully to schools following a period of part-time placement at the PRU. It is well able to demonstrate its success in almost all areas through its thorough and accurate self-evaluation. For instance, surveys show that parents and staff in schools are highly satisfied with the work done by the PRU. Schools find staff professional and approachable. They particularly appreciate the practical ideas and suggestions that help them to support the pupils referred and which they often adopt, thereby increasing their capacity to manage similar pupils in the future. Parents find staff similarly supportive. Pupils' key workers liaise closely with parents, who grow to understand their children better and improve their relationships with them. In addition, the PRU runs courses to help parents develop their own skills. The PRU is responsive to the views of its stakeholders and acts appropriately on constructive comments and suggestions. For instance, there are plans to better serve the most distant part of its area by establishing a satellite centre so that schools and pupils in this community have equal opportunities to access the services of the PRU.

Because their needs are met well and the teaching is good, pupils achieve well, making significant progress in their personal development and basic skills. Careful assessment and dialogue with both schools and parents at the time of referral enable staff to identify clearly pupils' needs and to set challenging targets for their social and emotional development, literacy and numeracy. The good curriculum is well matched to meet these needs. There is good enrichment, particularly through visits to the 'forest school' where pupils have opportunities for imaginative play, physical activity and co-operative working.

Pupils thoroughly enjoy coming to the PRU and this is reflected in exceptionally high levels of attendance and enjoyment of the activities. Intervention often results in pupils enjoying their learning more than they did previously. There are good opportunities for pupils to eat and drink healthily, to take exercise, and to learn about healthy lifestyles. They learn well how to take responsibility, for setting the lunchtime table and serving others for example. They also contribute well to the local community by collecting litter, raising funds for others and entertaining visitors. There are suitable opportunities for them to learn about how others live, when they celebrate Diwali, for instance. Staff ensure that pupils understand what it means to keep safe and there is good encouragement of safe and kind behaviour. Staff provide good role models in this respect and give continuous feedback to pupils so that they are clear about socially acceptable behaviour and know where boundaries lie. Pupils' good personal development is well evident in the data that the school collects and analyses using a variety of tools. Pupils make considerable gains in their self-esteem, because they are regularly praised and rewarded for good behaviour. They learn to understand and manage their feelings because they are well guided in doing this through the target setting process. Pupils know their targets and are kept aware of the importance of these by staff, who review their performance throughout the day and award smiley faces when targets have been met.

When pupils are referred to the PRU they have often fallen behind their peers because of their difficulties. Although standards rise they remain below average because of the short time that pupils are on the roll of the PRU. Data shows that pupils make good progress in their basic skills, particularly in speaking and listening, which is strongly promoted. They achieve almost

all of the targets set for them too. As a result of the improvements made pupils are better placed to benefit from provision in a mainstream setting. Staff plan carefully for transition and support pupils well in this process; consequently pupils return successfully to full-time mainstream education, usually after two or three terms.

At the heart of the PRU's success are the headteacher's good leadership and good management of staff. In particular, teamwork is very well developed. The professional development and well-being of staff both have a high profile. Their contributions are encouraged and their achievements celebrated. As a result they are highly skilled and show a strong commitment to the pupils they serve, demonstrating outstanding care and concern for them and frequently going the extra mile to forge good relationships with them.

Self-evaluation has improved since the last inspection and enables the PRU to identify its strengths and areas for development. However, information on the full breadth of gains made by children in the EYFS is not collated and analysed as effectively as the gains they make in personal development. Although teaching and learning across the provision are monitored and evaluated, those carrying out observations are not guided by a shared understanding of what constitutes good or outstanding teaching and learning, and so lessons are not graded and the PRU has no data to support its evaluation. Nonetheless, relative strengths and areas for development are known and teachers are well supported in improving their practice.

The work of the management committee remains satisfactory, as it was at the last inspection. Although a great deal of effort has gone into recruiting members and there is now a chair in place, there has been turnover, further difficulties in replacing those who have left and a changing constitution to manage. There are still vacancies and this has delayed the establishment of sub-committees through which the committee seeks to strengthen its role. There are several committed longstanding members, and between them they have a valuable range of skills and backgrounds pertinent to their roles on the committee. Several visit to look at the work of the PRU first hand and termly meetings ensure that the committee discharges its key responsibilities and keeps the PRU's work under review. The unit's development plan acknowledges that recruitment of the full complement of members is a priority.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Once children in a mainstream EYFS setting have been referred to the PRU, comprehensive and detailed information is rapidly gathered. Consequently staff have a very clear understanding of children's specific needs in those areas of personal and social development where they have greatest difficulty. Precise individual targets for children's personal, social and emotional development (PSED) are set and regularly reviewed, and because they are well supported they make good progress against these targets.

Provision for children's welfare is outstanding. Staff are highly successful in helping children to become increasingly aware of their own needs and those of others. There is an exemplary and consistent focus on giving children the skills to manage their own behaviour and so keep themselves safe. This means that children's personal and social development is consistently good and there are examples of children making outstanding progress in some areas.

The provision is led and managed well. There are particular strengths in the level of teamwork that means parents and other professionals receive consistent messages about what to expect of children. Parents, teachers and teaching assistants in other schools greatly appreciate the level of support that they and the children receive. Staff recognise that the wealth of data they

hold about children's progress in areas other than PSED might be collated and analysed to demonstrate progress across a wider range of skills, particularly communication, language and literacy and mathematical development.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that the management committee has a full complement of members.
- Strengthen self-evaluation by:
 - collating and analysing information on the wider gains made by children in the EYFS
 - agreeing with staff what constitutes good and outstanding teaching and learning, and using these criteria to monitor and evaluate lessons.

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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

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	2
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	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/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	2
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

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?	1

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?	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**

14 January 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of First Base, Brandon, IP27 0AD

Thank you for making us welcome when we visited First Base. We enjoyed our day and having lunch with you.

We agree that First Base is good. The best thing is that all the staff work very well together, especially to take care of you and make the base a place where you feel safe. You all enjoy coming so much that your attendance is excellent. Staff help you to behave in a way that others find acceptable, and to understand and control your feelings. We could see that you eat and drink healthily at the base and take plenty of exercise. You also help others and learn about the customs of those who are different to you. Staff also help you to improve your mathematics, reading and writing. Your speaking and listening skills come on very well.

The staff in the schools that you come from also think that First Base does a good job and so do your parents. Lots of children are helped to get on better in their schools so that they can continue to learn there. Others come to the base for part of the week and this helps them to improve so that they can go back to their schools after a while and enjoy learning there too.

At First Base they are going to do three main things to improve. They need to find more people to join the group that manages the base. Staff will be collecting more information about the progress made by children who are under the age of five and will use this to see how much children improve. Staff are also going to work out how to agree which lessons are good and which are outstanding.

You can help by trying hard to reach your targets. We wish you well.

Yours sincerely

Sue Aldridge

Lead inspector