

Link Education Centre (Mendip)

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	134694
Local Authority	Somerset
Inspection number	328951
Inspection date	5 December 2008
Reporting inspector	Jeffery Plumb

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	5–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	31
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Headteacher	Gary Nancekievill
Date of previous school inspection	28 February 2006
School address	St Dunstan's School Wells Road Glastonbury BA6 9BY
Telephone number	01458 832425
Fax number	01458 832425

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors. The inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the centre and investigated the following issues: achievement and standards, teaching and learning, the curriculum and leadership and management. The inspectors gathered evidence from lesson observations, examination of students' work, assessment data, interviews and documents. Other aspects of the centre's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the centre'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

The Link Education Centre (Mendip) is one of the seven provisions of the Somerset Medical Tuition Service. It is based on the campus of a comprehensive school. The centre supports students who have short-term or long-term medical needs, mental health needs and girls of school age who are pregnant or who have just become young mothers. Some students attend the centre for lessons, but the majority are supported at home or in other places such as local libraries. Younger students rarely, if ever, are taught in the centre. The provision is undergoing re-organization as the service moves to a distinct area-based model. The head of centre has been in position for just over a year. Attainment on entry is variable, but overall below average. There are very few ethnic minority students and none is at an early stage of learning to speak English. Girls significantly outnumber boys.

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 centre. Students enter it with significant gaps in their education. Often attendance at their mainstream schools is poor because of their emotional and complex mental health difficulties. A very successful working partnership between health professionals and education staff enables barriers students have to learning to be removed. Following therapy the majority of students with myalgic encephalopathy (ME) make rapid gains in energy and re-engage with learning. Similarly, high quality counselling provided by a psychiatric nurse enables a significant majority of students with complex mental health difficulties to believe in themselves again. As they gain in confidence and begin to work collaboratively with their peers, often for the first time in their lives, their learning accelerates. They begin to enjoy learning and their attendance improves very significantly. Overall, given students' medical needs, including for a few in regression, attendance is good. Expectations are high for all students. Dignity and respect for every student lies at the heart of this successful centre. All staff work ceaselessly to ensure that every student reaches her or his full potential. Parents are delighted with what this centre achieves for their children. Their views are aptly summed up by the parent who says, 'There is an excellent mix of empathy and challenge for students here and I would not have a clue where I would be without this centre.'

Achievement is good. Curriculum experiences in physical education and art are crafted to support students to work together in teams. As their confidence to do so increases, their self-esteem begins to improve, as does their behaviour. Overall, behaviour is good, allowing for students' complex behaviours linked to their mental health needs. The staff skilfully support students who self-harm and who have eating disorders. There is a good balance between meeting students' physical and emotional health needs. The centre successfully enables the majority of students to adopt safe practices. The provision for sex and drugs education is good, but a few students' mental health needs are a barrier to them adopting a completely safe lifestyle. Through enterprise projects students learn important life skills such as budgeting and how to run a small business. Students say, 'We can concentrate in this environment and our teachers help us to learn.' As students settle they make good progress in English, mathematics, science and information and communication technology, but overall standards are below the national average. The majority re-integrate successfully into mainstream schools to sit their GCSEs and go on to achieve creditable passes, including passes above the national average. The vast majority successfully go on to further education colleges when they leave. Re-integration from this centre to mainstream education is a significant success story.

Teaching and learning are good. Relationships are excellent and a learning environment exists where students feel safe to take risks and not be embarrassed when they make errors. In a Year 11 English lesson the teacher said, 'I want you to assess your writing.' A student replied, 'Oh that will be rubbish then.' The teacher skilfully built the student's confidence and the student went on to make good progress in analysing a piece of non-fiction text. Teachers know what makes students tick and flexibly plan to ensure that students work in an environment which both challenges and supports them. However, the tracking of students' academic progress over time is not sufficiently robust and so teachers do not always have the fine-tuned data required to inform students' immediate next steps for learning. Target setting to raise students' academic achievement is not sufficiently secure. Tracking and target setting to improve students' social development, behaviour and attendance is meticulous. Overall, the curriculum is good. Flexibly planned, the curriculum is tailored to the needs of each student, but there is a deficiency. Every

effort is made to work to students' interests and find them courses such as dance and music in mainstream schools. Students continue on projects in the centre started in subjects such as history and design and technology, which they enjoyed in their mainstream schools. However, access to accredited vocational courses at college is limited. The local authority has a plan to address this, linked to new funding arrangements, which will enable the centre to purchase these courses for its students directly. Although work-related skills are developed through the curriculum, students do not have sufficient work experience opportunities. Very good use is made of visits and visitors to enhance students' learning. The virtual classroom model, which engages students with on-line learning in their homes, is an excellent programme.

Care, guidance and support are good, as is students' personal development. Child protection procedures are robust and meet government guidelines. Risk assessments are thorough and detailed. Students say, 'We feel safer than when in normal school.' External careers advice is good. Induction procedures are excellent because home visits prior to students' entry find out what really makes them tick and engage parents in supporting their children to learn. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students is good. The students' voice is heard and acted upon to benefit their provision. Community cohesion is shaped in the context of students' mental health difficulties and its components include community conflict resolution and investigation of global issues. Awareness of diversity issues, including culturally diverse issues, is developed in an emotionally intelligent environment. Leadership and management are good. The head of centre's vision and determination to remove barriers to learning for students with medical and mental health needs are shared by all staff. In a short space of time he has effectively managed change, as evidenced by the recent introduction of baseline assessment to provide a platform from which to measure students' academic progress. Overall, monitoring and evaluation are good. The management committee is shaping up well and supports and challenges the head of centre effectively. Improvement since the previous inspection is good, as is the capacity for further improvement. The centre provides good value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the tracking of students' progress in English, mathematics and science and use performance data to set more robust academic targets to raise student achievement.
- Work in partnership with the local authority to increase the opportunities for students to access vocational courses at college.

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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?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	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	2
The attendance of learners	2
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	3
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	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

5 December 2008

Dear Students

Link Education Centre (Mendip), Glastonbury BA6 9BY

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave us as visitors to your centre. We greatly enjoyed meeting with you and talking with you. Your enjoyment and enthusiasm for learning made a marked impression on us. You are very well cared for and your views on how your education needs can be better met are taken very seriously. The very good therapy you receive helps you to gain in confidence and self-esteem. As you become more confident your concentration and learning improve. You achieve well and are equipped to go back full-time to your mainstream schools or to colleges of further education.

Your centre is good. The centre supports you well in adopting a healthy and safe lifestyle. You showed us that you care about your community and that you want to get better and succeed in life. Your head of centre and staff lead and manage your centre well.

We have asked the centre to work with the local authority to increase the range and number of vocational courses available to you at college. We have also asked the centre to make sure that your improvements in English, mathematics and science are carefully measured while you are supported by the centre and to use this information to help you improve your work and further raise your achievement.

Thank you for showing us just how well behaved you are and the determination you have to overcome your medical difficulties and become responsible and hard working citizens who are determined to be successful in life.

Yours sincerely

Jeffery Plumb Lead inspector