

Link Education Centre (Sedgemoor)

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	134758
Local Authority	Somerset
Inspection number	328970
Inspection date	4 February 2009
Reporting inspector	Steffi Penny HMI

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

Type of school	Pupil referral unit
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	10–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	20
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Pat Parker
Headteacher	Bev Fournier
Date of previous school inspection	20 March 2006
School address	Friarn Avenue Bridgwater TA6 3RF
Telephone number	01278 726043
Fax number	01278 726043

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors, who evaluated the overall effectiveness of the pupil referral unit (PRU) and investigated the following issues:

- achievement and standards, and the use of academic and personal progress data to inform planning
- the effectiveness of the curriculum
- the match between the amount of tuition time allocated and students' individual circumstances and needs.

Evidence was gathered from the analysis of students' test results, observation of lessons, parents' questionnaires, discussions with the senior leadership team, staff, the management committee, the improvement partner and students, and scrutiny of samples of students' work. Discussions were also held with representatives from dual placement schools, the Connexions service, the Children's and Adolescent Mental Health Service, and the Educational Psychology service. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector 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

This PRU caters for students with short- and long-term medical and health-related conditions that prevent them attending their mainstream schools. It also supports girls of school age who are pregnant or who have just become young mothers. The number of students on roll regularly changes as they enter the PRU and return to their other schools, or to new settings. They spend varying periods of time at the PRU but receive a minimum of five hours of tuition each week, either in their homes or at the teaching base, located in the Bridgwater YMCA. Some gain additional hours through being taught at home in the virtual classroom. At the time of the inspection all students were White British and the vast majority were girls. All students accessing the PRU are dual registered, remaining on roll with their school whilst in receipt of medical tuition. The PRU is part of the Somerset Medical Tuition Service, which is currently being re-organised. The teaching base that houses students in Years 10 and 11 is due to be demolished in April 2009. The PRU shares the same management committee as that of the behavioural PRUs in the local area.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The Link Education Centre (Sedgemoor) provides a good quality of education. It works exceptionally well in partnership with parents, outside agencies and the dual placement schools, so that students have the best possible chance of succeeding. The teacher in charge provides exceedingly good leadership and management, and this has ensured good improvements since the last inspection. The capacity to further improve is good, but it is limited by the ongoing issue of teaching base accommodation that is not fit for purpose. The management committee is relatively new, and not all of its members are sufficiently conversant with the needs and provision of the medical PRU to ensure that they can act as critical friends to it and the local authority.

Typically students have a history of continued absence from school, low self-esteem and low energy levels. Some have problems with social interaction through long-standing isolation linked with mental health issues. The combination of prolonged ill health and absence means that many of the students achieve academically below the expected National Curriculum levels for their age. Given their particular circumstances and medical needs, students make good progress academically. Their social and emotional progress is at least good and in some cases exceptional. All students, irrespective of their gender, ethnicity or background, achieve equally well. On leaving tuition the majority of students continue in full-time education or training. Those parents who responded to the questionnaire were all very positive about the work that the PRU does. One parent wrote, 'My child has thrived since being educated through the centre and we are very pleased with the achievements made and the support that they have given to us'. The majority of the students have not liked school in the past. Although during the inspection some of the students found the social aspects very challenging, they enjoyed their learning and behaviour is exceptional. They recognise the improvements to their self-confidence and self-esteem and increasingly make useful contributions in lessons and discussions.

The use of visits to Fyne Court enhances the curriculum for those students who attend the teaching base and has an outstanding impact on these students' personal development and well-being. Students were rightly proud to show the inspector their photo book that records the conservation and environmental activities that they have undertaken as volunteers. Students demonstrated how they had contributed to their local community by working together to clear the pond of weeds, tidy the grounds and plant bulbs. They also showed the new artistic skills that they had learned with their fantastic willow weaving. Students are proud of the certificates they gain through such activities as they stand as an affirmation of how well they are progressing in their social and academic development. They are well prepared for the future through their participation in work experience placements, their academic work and their increased social and emotional skills. Whilst the curriculum overall provided throughout the PRU is good, the access to link courses, for students who are able to access them, at the local college is an area that the PRU knows needs to be developed further.

Teachers use assessment data to ensure that lessons are carefully planned so that work is pitched at the right level of challenge for individual students. Activities are monitored closely and sensitive links are created in order to build self-confidence and promote community cohesion. However, staff are aware that they are not yet doing enough to ensure that all students have good awareness about how young people and their families from other backgrounds and heritages contribute to life in Great Britain.

All students show considerable improvement in their attendance compared with their previous schools, where they were very poor attendees, and overall attendance is satisfactory. Staff have high expectations and provide exceedingly good role models for the students. Laptop computers are available for students and the virtual classroom offers good quality interactive teaching and learning opportunities for those students who have access to it. The use of live and recorded lessons provides great flexibility for students, particularly as the lessons can be accessed at home. It is a highly appropriate and creative teaching and learning resource. It reduces discontinuity, adding great value to the PRU curriculum provision.

A wide range of exam boards are followed by the different dual placement schools and even when they are the same, modules are not often synchronised. This makes teaching a challenge but the teachers cope extremely well because of their very good subject knowledge and experience. Teaching and learning are hindered by the lack of interactive and web-based information and communication technology (ICT) resources in the base. The teacher in charge is aware of this and intends to provide it when they have a base that is solely used by the PRU. The current accommodation for the teaching base is in a central neutral location. Staff take very good advantage of this to enhance learning opportunities by challenging students' fitness levels and their fears.

Although the tracking of progress is relatively new, the PRU has already identified from its data analysis that some specific areas need to be investigated further; for example, students' performance in mathematics and to see if more students could benefit from access to the interactive classroom. All teachers teach at least once a week at the centre and this helps them keep in regular contact with the leaders and managers to monitor work and progress.

The PRU has excellent links with its partners through key workers so that it provides a comprehensive multi-agency approach to help support students and their families. Safeguarding procedures are robust and meet current statutory requirements. There are regular meetings to provide information exchanges and updates to the progress that students are making in their academic and personal development. Partners regard the PRU's willingness to work with them in highly flexible ways as a significant vehicle for them to provide their services to those who need them most.

Communications are regarded as particularly effective when planning activities, delivering them and monitoring their impact. The head of the PRU rightly sees this as a vital aspect for improving the life chances of the students and their families. The recent and future restructuring of some of the partnerships has and will provide good opportunities for further developments in shared working practices and resources.

What the school should do to improve further

- Extend the access to link courses and the use of interactive and web-based ICT resources for all students.
- Ensure that students have greater awareness about how young people and their families from other backgrounds and heritages contribute to life in Great Britain.
- Ensure that the new buildings and rooms used by the PRU are fit for purpose and enhance students' learning opportunities.
- Ensure that the management committee members are fully conversant with the needs and provision of the medical PRU so that they can act as critical friends to it and the local authority.

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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	3
The behaviour of learners	1
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	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**

5 February 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Link Education Centre (Sedgemoor), Somerset TA6 3RF

I enjoyed my visit to your teaching base in Bridgwater and meeting and talking with you. Please could you thank your parents/carers for the many helpful comments they made on the questionnaires. In return, I want to let you know the inspection findings so that you can see for yourselves what I thought, although you can always read the full report yourselves at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

- Your centre is good.
- Many of you develop your self-confidence well.
- You make good progress in your work and in improving your attendance.
- Staff look after you extremely well.
- You are taught well and enjoy your learning more.
- Your virtual classroom helps you learn very well.
- Your trips to Fyne Court make a big difference to how you feel and help other people.

To make your learning even better, I have asked the leaders and managers to make sure that:

- you all have the chance to join more types of courses
- you can all use more types of computer programs and the Internet
- you all know more about how young people and their families from other backgrounds live in Great Britain
- the new buildings and rooms used as a teaching base are better than ones used now
- the people who support the teacher in charge can help her to make things even better for you.

Thank you again for being so polite and helpful during the visit. I hope that you continue to enjoy your learning and do your best. Wishing you all a happy and successful future.

Steffi Penny Her Majesty's Inspector