

Stevenage Education Support Centre

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	130359
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	341033
Inspection dates	15–16 September 2009
Reporting inspector	Margaret Goodchild

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	11–14
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	7
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Headteacher	Philip Elcock
Date of previous school inspection	20–21 June 2007
School address	Camps Hill Junior Mixed and Infant School Chells Way Stevenage SG2 0LT
Telephone number	01438 369119
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Introduction

This inspection of the Education Support Centre (ESC) was carried out by two additional inspectors. The inspectors visited eight lessons, and held meetings with a representative of the local authority, staff from the centre, the outreach service and a group of pupils. They observed the ESC's work and looked at planning, assessment and self-evaluation materials.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the ESC's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- what data and other evidence show about the progress pupils make during their time at the ESC and through the impact of its outreach work
- how thoroughly staff assess and diagnose pupils' learning needs and match learning opportunities accordingly
- the extent to which leaders rigorously monitor and evaluate the ESC's work, including that of the outreach service, to drive continuous improvement.

Information about the school

The Stevenage Education Support Centre (ESC) consists of a pupil referral unit and an outreach support service. Throughout this report, the term 'centre' is used to refer to the work of the pupil referral unit, whereas 'ESC' is used when reporting on the full range of services provided. The centre provides for pupils aged 11 to 14 who have been excluded or are in danger of exclusion from mainstream secondary schools. These pupils typically spend up to 14 weeks at the centre in preparation for being reintegrated into a new secondary school or return to their original school. Thirty-four pupils have spent time at the centre over the past year. Of the seven pupils currently attending, five joined the centre just before the inspection and two at the end of last term. Although the centre caters for boys and girls, all the pupils currently on roll are boys and they are all of White British heritage. All the pupils have emotional, social and behavioural difficulties; a small minority have additional special educational needs or disabilities. The outreach support service works with primary and secondary schools in Stevenage, providing support to pupils and advice to staff, to reduce the risk of exclusion. Up to 200 pupils benefit from this service in a typical year. The centre's role has changed since the last inspection, so that it now concentrates solely on working with pupils aged 11 to 14 across the North Hertfordshire area.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate
Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

The ESC makes good provision for the small number of pupils who attend the centre and it meets with a high level of success in preventing exclusions from mainstream school. Outstanding arrangements for reintegration mean that the vast majority of pupils are successfully returned to school after a short time. The staff team is stable and very experienced in working with pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties, and the ESC works exceptionally well in partnership with schools, other agencies and parents. Improvements in the outreach service and in arrangements for reintegration have led to a 200% decline in the number of permanent exclusions in the area since the last inspection. As a result, the work of the ESC is held in high regard by local schools.

Pupils who attend the centre for a short time because they have been permanently excluded or are at risk of exclusion make good progress in their learning. Teaching is good overall and there is some outstanding teaching, especially in art and science. Throughout the centre, staff manage pupils' behaviour very well and newly arrived pupils quickly settle in. Pupils say that they feel safe, and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils have satisfactory opportunities to contribute to the centre and to the wider community. Where teaching is at its best, teachers plan their lessons thoroughly and provide a range of stimulating learning opportunities that challenge pupils to think deeply and work hard. In some lessons, teaching and learning are outstanding but, occasionally, lessons are not planned in so much depth and the content of these lessons tends to be less challenging. Nevertheless, good relationships between staff and pupils ensure that pupils still enjoy the activities and behave well. The centre has thorough systems for assessing pupils' personal and behavioural difficulties and their academic attainment. It uses this information well in matching the curriculum to pupils' needs. However, targets in individual education plans are not always specific and measurable, so that they do not inform teaching as closely as they should.

The ESC is led and managed well and senior leaders have sustained and built on the good practice found at the last inspection. The ESC provides good value for money and it is well placed to improve further. Subject leaders make a strong contribution to self-evaluation and the work of the outreach service is managed very well. Rigorous systems are in place to check the impact of outreach support on pupils' behaviour and personal development, and the ESC regularly seeks the views of mainstream schools and parents. Teachers measure the progress pupils make in reading, mathematics and spelling during their time at the centre, and staff regularly

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review the provision made for individual pupils. Senior leaders have a realistic view of the ESC's strengths and weaknesses, and work towards the right development priorities. Since the last inspection, the ESC has increased the data it collects. This, and information from monitoring, could be used more effectively to demonstrate the centre's effectiveness. The ESC has begun to gather information from which to judge the long-term impact of its work on pupils' attainment but this aspect of self evaluation is not yet fully developed.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise the quality of teaching from good to outstanding by ensuring that teachers consistently:
 - plan their lessons in depth and pack them with challenging learning opportunities
 - use assessment information to full effect by setting specific and measurable targets in individual education plans.
- Strengthen the drive for improvement by:
 - increasing the rigour with which teachers' planning and pupils' individual education plans are monitored
 - collating and analysing progress data and other monitoring information to form a sharper overview of the centre's work
 - in collaboration with mainstream schools and the Key Stage 4 ESC, measure the long-term effect of the centre's work on pupils' academic achievement.
- Extend opportunities for pupils to make a positive contribution to the local and wider community.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

From their low starting points, the ESC enables pupils to make rapid progress in basic skills and to fill important gaps in their knowledge and understanding. The good quality teaching ensures that pupils learn at a good rate in lessons. In the short time they spend at the centre, pupils with literacy difficulties make significant progress through regular paired reading and, typically, make well over a year's progress in their reading age in the course of a few weeks. Pupils with mathematical learning difficulties make similar progress and all pupils produce a substantial amount of work in mathematics. A small minority of higher performing pupils reach above average standards in mathematics. Learning and progress are outstanding in art, where pupils produce work that is above, and in some cases, well above average in two and three dimensions. This has led to a minority of pupils gaining GCSE in art during Year 9. Pupils also do particularly well in science, where they respond well to lively teaching and the interesting range of topics covered. In personal, social and health education, pupils make good progress and reach average standards. There are no differences in the progress made by different groups of pupils, including boys

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and girls, minority ethnic groups and pupils with additional special educational needs. Furthermore, by enabling pupils to return successfully to mainstream school or avoid permanent exclusion, the ESC ensures that pupils have the opportunity to continue to build on the good progress they have made.

Pupils appreciate the safe learning environment provided at the centre and say that they are free from bullying. The work of the centre and outreach support team enables pupils to make an outstanding improvement in their behaviour. As a result, behaviour is good. Pupils quickly learn to cooperate with the staff and recognise that this is necessary if they are to return to mainstream school or avoid exclusion. Pupils enjoy trusting relationships with the staff and feel confident that there is always someone they can talk to. A pupil expressed this by telling a member of the outreach team that he felt able to cope 'because I've got you'. Pupils have a satisfactory understanding of healthy living and generally respond well to activities that are aimed at promoting their health. Pupils' positive attitudes to the centre enable it to function in a calm and harmonious way and pupils make some gains in their understanding of the needs of others. However, opportunities for them to take responsibility and to contribute to the local and wider community are rather limited and this restricts this aspect of their development. Pupils make good progress in developing their basic skills and personal qualities during their short time at the centre and through the work of the outreach service. This means that they are much more likely to succeed in the future. Most pupils attend regularly: a small minority pull down the overall attendance rate to satisfactory. However, efforts to improve the attendance rate have been very successful and have led to a 12% improvement since the last inspection.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	3
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

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How effective is the provision?

The ESC has exceptionally clear admission procedures and works closely with mainstream schools to identify those pupils who will benefit most from the support of the outreach service. Before a pupil is admitted, a home visit is conducted and an 'exit date' is set so that the staff, pupils and parents are clear about expectations. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and the fact that they teach at the centre and in the outreach service helps to make for seamless provision between different aspects of support. The curriculum meets pupils' academic and personal needs well, and work is underway to make the curriculum more motivating in Year 9. For example, pupils have opportunities to learn cooking skills, work with textiles and take part in a range of physical and outward bound activities. They study for a certificate in first aid and in food hygiene, and the centre is in the process of introducing courses to teach pupils about and hazards at work and to develop their financial capability. Throughout the centre, Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA) Unit Awards in mathematics and information and communication technology provide a useful structure to pupils' learning.

Pupils are known as individuals and the ESC works very closely with families as well as with a range of agencies to provide high quality care, guidance and support carefully tailored to each pupil's needs. This is key to the rapid progress pupils make in their attitudes and behaviour. Close working with mainstream teachers is key to the outstanding arrangements for reintegration into school or for providing pupils with a fresh start. When a pupil is placed at the centre, a member of staff from the mainstream school visits on a weekly basis to see how the pupil is being supported and to ensure the pupil does not feel abandoned by the school. A staggered system of reintegration ensures pupils spend as much time as they can manage in mainstream, supported for the first few weeks by the ESC reintegration manager. The outreach staff then take over, monitoring the pupil's successful full-time reintegration into school, and supporting and advising their mainstream colleagues wherever necessary.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher and other senior leaders work well with the local authority and

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management committee to provide direction for the ESC's work. Preparations for the move to new accommodation in a few years time are based on a clear vision for the future. Senior leaders work very well together. Visits to other pupil referral units have helped to shape their awareness. The local authority provides good strategic management and has systems in place which enable the ESC to work effectively. Parents are closely involved in decision making and the centre's recent development of a family support service has been outstanding in engaging parents. The ESC has excellent relationships with mainstream schools, which help to explain their readiness to reintegrate pupils. Schools describe the work of the outreach service as 'brilliant' and 'fantastic'. The work of the centre and the outreach service makes a very good contribution to ensuring that all pupils have equal opportunities, regardless of their previous behavioural difficulties. The ESC has good systems to ensure that pupils are kept safe and staff are very well trained in child protection. The ESC has a good understanding of the religious, ethnic and socio-economic background of its pupils. It promotes community cohesion well within the centre so that pupils get on harmoniously together. It is at an early stage in promoting community cohesion in the local and wider community.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Views of parents and carers

No parental questionnaires were returned, reflecting the fact that five of the seven pupils had only just been admitted at the time of the inspection. The ESC regularly gathers parents' views: this evidence shows that parents value the help provided for their children. They are very appreciative of the work of the outreach service and the centre.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Stevenage Education Support Centre to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 12 statements about the school.

The inspection team received no completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are seven pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
Type of school	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>the following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



17 September 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Stevenage Education Support Centre, Stevenage, SG2 0LT

Thank you for making us welcome when we visited the Education Support Centre (ESC) and for telling us what it is like to be a pupil there.

We agree with you that the ESC does a good job in helping you to avoid exclusion and if you have been excluded already, to return quickly to mainstream school. It has outstanding links with local schools that make this possible. You told us that the teaching is good and that you get on well with the staff because they care about you. You are making good progress with your work, especially improving your reading and mathematics, and you produce some fantastic work in art. Most of you had been in the centre for less than two weeks at the time of our visit and we were impressed by how quickly you had settled in. Already, your behaviour is much better than it was in school and you are learning the importance of concentrating and working hard.

The headteacher and other teachers are always working to make the ESC better for you. We want to help them with this and so we have suggested that they:

- make sure you always have a lot of challenging work to do in lessons
- use all the information they collect about you to make sure the targets in your IEPs say exactly what you need to do to improve.
- check lesson plans and IEPs really carefully to make sure these things are happening
- bring together all they know about the ESC to show even more clearly how well it is doing and what might be improved
- work with schools to see how much your time at the ESC helps in the future
- provide more opportunities for you to make a positive contribution to the community in and beyond Stevenage.

Keep trying hard and doing your very best during the rest of your time at the ESC.

Yours faithfully
Ms M J Goodchild
Lead Inspector

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