

North Area Pupil Referral Unit

The Old Magistrate's Court, 29 Bancroft, Hitchin, SG5 1JW

Inspection dates 20–21 May 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- Students make much better progress than expected and gain a wide range of qualifications at Key Stage 4.
- At the end of Year 11, nearly all students go on to employment, training or further education.
- The unit is extremely thorough in assessing students' learning and in providing support to those who need particular help.
- The quality of teaching is outstanding in a number of subjects especially at Key Stage 4; it is good in other areas.
- The outreach service provides outstanding support to local primary and secondary schools. It is held in high esteem because it is so successful in preventing students from being excluded from school.
- Students' behaviour, attendance and attitudes to learning show excellent improvement. The unit has exceptionally good systems to keep students safe.
- The headteacher provides outstanding leadership and is supported extremely well by other leaders and managers. The staff are always working to make things better for the students. As a result, there has been good improvement in teaching and achievement since the previous inspection.
- The management committee is knowledgeable about the unit's work. Its members keep a close check on the unit's effectiveness and provide both support and challenge to senior leaders.
- The range of courses is matched closely to students' needs and informed by their hopes for the future. It enables them to make outstanding progress in their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed 14 lessons, all jointly with the headteacher or a deputy headteacher.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, the two deputy headteachers (one of whom is also the special educational needs co-ordinator) and with the assistant headteacher who leads the outreach service. Informal discussions took place with a number of staff and students. Meetings were held with the chair of the management committee and with an assistant headteacher from a local mainstream secondary school. A telephone discussion took place with a representative from the local authority.
- The inspectors were not able to consider responses to the online survey (Parent View) because there were not enough of them, but they took into account the unit's own survey of parents' and students' views.
- The inspectors observed the unit's work and looked at a range of documentation. These included: the unit's self-evaluation records and development plans; records of students' attainment, progress, behaviour and attendance; samples of students' work; and evidence of systems for protecting and safeguarding students.

Inspection team

Margaret Goodchild, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Sa'ad Khaldi

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The pupil referral unit provides for students who have behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. A significant group of students also have mental health issues or learning difficulties. All the students are supported either through school action plus or have a statement of special educational needs.
- The proportion of students for whom the unit receives pupil premium funding is high. This is additional government funding for students known to be eligible for free school meals or who are looked after by the local authority.
- The proportion of students of minority ethnic heritage is broadly average but there are currently no students learning to speak English as an additional language.
- The unit mainly serves the needs of students at Key Stage 4 from across North Hertfordshire. Through an arrangement with Stevenage Education Support Centre, the unit has also been providing for a small group of Key Stage 3 students over the past year.
- The unit is based at two locations: provision for the small group of students at Key Stage 3 and for a number of the Key Stage 4 students is at Letchworth, while the remaining Key Stage 4 students attend the Hitchin site.
- The unit provides on-site tuition for students at Key Stage 4 who are dual-registered with their mainstream schools but were at serious risk of permanent exclusion from school. The remaining students are registered solely at the unit because they have either been permanently excluded from mainstream school or have no school place.
- A small group of students attend alternative provision, Right Trax, for a motorcycle maintenance session for two hours a week.
- The unit provides an outreach service for 52 primary, seven secondary and two middle schools. Part of this service involves reintegration programmes for students at Key Stages 1 to 4 who are returning to mainstream education either from the unit's own roll or from a local special school for students with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties.
- In addition, the unit provides a service, known as 'Bridge 29', to the local authority's residential homes for young people who would otherwise be unable to access education.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Establish more business links and use these to extend the range of learning opportunities and experiences available to students.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is outstanding

- Students join the unit with attainment that is well below national expectations for their age and with a history of poor attendance, disrupted education and negative attitudes to learning.
- Achievement is outstanding because most students at Key Stage 4 make much better progress than expected and gain a wide range of qualifications. They frequently exceed their predicted examination grades and in 2013, over half the students in Year 11 gained between three and five GCSE passes. Students also gained a number of Entry Level, Functional Skills and work-related awards. There are no early entries to GCSE.
- All groups of students make similar progress, including those of minority ethnic heritage, boys and girls. As a result of the academic and personal progress they make during their time at the unit, nearly all students go on to employment, training or further education when they leave.
- The unit makes exceptionally good use of its pupil premium funding, providing carefully tailored programmes to meet the learning needs of eligible students and to improve their attendance. It enables students to fill gaps in their basic skills and to make outstanding progress. In 2013, there was very little difference in English and mathematics between the attainment of students supported by the pupil premium and the rest of the students.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs make outstanding progress because the exact nature of their learning difficulties is carefully assessed. Each student then follows an individual support programme, with precise learning targets that are regularly reviewed. Students who join the unit with reading ages well below their chronological ages make on average two years' worth of progress often over only a few months.
- The most-able students make exceptionally good progress in response to teachers' high expectations. For example, in their GCSE English coursework, students produce convincing interpretations of texts they have studied, drawing on carefully selected quotations. In a GCSE mathematics lesson, one student used three-dimensional projection of a triangular pyramid, plotting along the x, y and z axes, and another worked unaided on algebraic expressions.
- Students at Key Stage 3 make good progress academically and in their personal development. The unit enables them to develop the right attitudes and learning skills for return to mainstream school or, in a few cases, transfer to special schools. Of those admitted to the unit during the past year, almost half have already returned to mainstream school.
- The large number of pupils at Key Stages 1 and 2 and students at Key Stages 3 and 4 who receive outreach support are enabled to remain in school and make much better progress than they would otherwise do. In the words of a mainstream headteacher, 'The service regularly turns apparent lost causes into successes'.

The quality of teaching is outstanding

- There is much outstanding teaching, with particular strengths in English, mathematics, art, information and communication technology, catering and hairdressing.
- When students join the unit, staff conduct very thorough assessments to identify what they know and can do, what they need to learn next and in which areas they would benefit from

extra help. The special educational needs co-ordinator creates a profile for disabled students and those who have special educational needs, detailing the exact nature of their difficulties and advising teachers and teaching assistants about what they can do for the best to meet their needs.

- Teachers make very good use of assessment information to plan learning that provides the right level of challenge for all the students. In English and mathematics, they take into account the work-related courses that students are following. For instance, for students on the BTEC catering course, the mathematics teacher makes sure that they include work on volume and measurement. This means that students have the necessary basic skills to succeed in their work-related courses and it increases their motivation for learning.
- Teachers have high expectations and very good subject knowledge. They are highly skilled in questioning students, as seen in a dynamic and fast-moving English lesson at Key Stage 4 where the teacher skilfully drew out students' understanding of the key themes in *Romeo and Juliet*. This resulted in wide-ranging discussion about the play and what it revealed about the social climate of the time in which it was set.
- Teachers often mark students' work immediately it is completed, discussing it with them in the lesson. They make clear what students can do to improve, and link their comments directly to examination criteria. Students are left in no doubt about what they need to do to achieve a particular grade. Sometimes, teachers ask them to grade their own work and in art, the teacher has produced a very detailed booklet that takes students carefully through the process of evaluating their coursework.
- When speaking of the outreach teachers, a senior leader from a local secondary school said, 'Our school would not work without them: they are part of our team.' He went on to praise the excellent liaison that takes place between outreach staff and mainstream teachers and the way the unit provides support 'above and beyond' what could be expected in order to meet students' needs.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- The behaviour of students is outstanding. When they join the unit, students rapidly gain in confidence and trust, realising that it is giving them the chance to turn their lives around.
- Students are motivated by the subjects and courses on offer and say that they work harder and make better progress at the unit than they did at their mainstream schools. The highly supportive environment provided by the staff transforms their attitudes and raises their self-esteem so that they want to learn.
- Improvements to students' behaviour during their time at the unit are outstanding. Staff are very skilled in managing students' behaviour and consistent in communicating high expectations. Lessons proceed without disruption and breaks are sociable, harmonious occasions.
- Students know about different types of bullying and nearly all say that it is not a problem at the unit. Through personal, social and health education and tutor periods, they learn about the importance of tolerance and come to realise that discrimination is unacceptable.
- The unit's work to keep students safe and secure is outstanding. It conducts thorough risk assessments to make sure any alternative or off-site activities are safe. Visits by the police and fire service help to raise students' awareness of possible sources of danger and encourage students to make safe choices for themselves.

- A mainstream school said, 'Through the work of the outreach service, a significant number of individuals have avoided a downward spiral of poor behaviour and become more productive and effective members of the school community.'
- The unit has been remarkably successful in raising the attendance rate since the previous inspection so that it is now only just below the national average for mainstream schools. It has achieved this through a combination of close work with families and other agencies and a celebration of each improvement in a student's attendance. As a result, nearly all students attend very regularly.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The headteacher is passionate about doing everything possible to enable students to succeed. She is supported exceptionally well by other leaders and managers and ensures that all the staff work towards a common goal. Leadership of the unit and the outreach service are both excellent. Senior leaders and members of the management committee have a clear vision for the unit and are ambitious for its further development.
 - Leaders are always looking for ways to improve and they are extremely thorough in the way they check all aspects of the unit's work. They analyse a wealth of information about students' achievement, behaviour and attendance, and carry out detailed checks on teachers' work. All staff are held closely to account for the effect of their work on students' progress and teachers receive very detailed guidance about how to improve their practice. As a result, teaching and achievement have improved from good to outstanding since the previous inspection.
 - The curriculum is matched well to students' interests and learning needs, offering either academic or more work-related options for each student at Key Stage 4. Work-related facilities within the unit, such as a hairdressing salon, contribute greatly to the opportunities provided. At Key Stage 3, the emphasis is on literacy, numeracy, topic work and developing students' personal and social skills for return to mainstream school.
 - The unit provides opportunities for students to go on regular trips, including residential visits, and to take part in special events such as the Schools' Shakespeare Festival, when three of its students performed on stage at St Albans. Excellent attention is given to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development through work in subjects and topics and particularly through the excellent relationships between staff and students. Leaders make sure that all students are fully included in all activities and that all have equal opportunities to succeed.
 - Students at Key Stage 4 go on work experience and there are strong links with local colleges. However, business links to extend students' opportunities and experiences are more limited and the unit has not fully explored the types of partnerships that have been established by some other outstanding pupil referral units.
- **The governance of the school:**
- The local authority, in its governance role, provides support and challenge through regular visits to look at data, teaching and to discuss leaders' evaluations of the unit's work. Members of the management committee, many of whom are local mainstream headteachers, have a detailed knowledge of the unit's work and hold leaders to account. They know how well students are achieving and are clear about how teachers' performance is managed. They check closely on the use of pupil premium funding to ensure it is effective and make sure that all statutory requirements are met. They make sure that systems for protecting and safeguarding students are extremely thorough.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	130344
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	439652

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 of pupils on the school roll	100
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Headteacher	Julie Vernon-Hamilton
Date of previous school inspection	15 March 2011
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