

# The Linden Centre

Oak Road, Overdale, Telford, TF3 5BT

**Inspection dates** 17–18 December 2013

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school.

- Pupils who previously found it very hard to get on in mainstream schools are helped to get involved with learning and quickly start to make good progress.
- Teaching is good. Teachers want the best and they develop positive relationships with pupils that help them to see learning in a much more constructive way.
- The local authority gives good support from its own services, helping the centre to make sure that pupils are able to continue to do well when they go back full-time to their own schools.
- Pupils say they feel safe in the centre.
- Pupils are given effective support in helping them to take more responsibility for their own actions and behaviour. There is a clear and effective behaviour policy in place.
- Leaders and managers are very experienced in working with pupils with challenging behaviour and share their expertise with staff to create a team that is dedicated to supporting the pupils who come to the centre.
- Leaders, including members of the management committee, work hard to make sure that staff are well supported and able to develop their own expertise as well as meeting the needs of the centre.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Standards in writing are not as high as those in reading and mathematics.
- There are not yet sufficient opportunities for centre staff to observe best practice in mainstream primary schools, or share their own best practice with mainstream colleagues.
- Leaders and managers are not yet able to measure their long-term success in re-integrating pupils into mainstream schools.

## Information about this inspection

- A total of six lessons were observed, taught by the centre's two teachers. The inspector also listened to pupils reading and looked at the work in their books.
- Meetings were held with the executive headteacher, lead teacher and pupils of the centre; the service delivery manager for leadership and management and the leader for special educational needs learning and behaviour from the local authority and one of the authority's advisers; the headteacher of a local primary school; and the Chair of the centre's Management Committee.
- A telephone discussion was also held with another headteacher from a local primary school who had re-integrated a pupil previously at the centre.
- It was not possible to directly gather the views of parents. The very small number of pupils at the centre meant that not enough replies to the on-line Parent View questionnaire were received, while pupils are brought to the centre by taxi and their parents or carers do not accompany them. Inspectors did take account of the centre's own evidence of parental views.
- The views of pupils were gathered from discussions held with them in lessons and throughout the inspection.
- The views of staff were gathered from their replies to the staff questionnaire and discussions.
- A range of written evidence was taken into account, including evidence on pupils' progress, teachers' planning and marking, the centre's self-evaluation and improvement planning, and a range of policies and procedures, including those for safeguarding.

## Inspection team

Martyn Groucutt, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- Following a wide-ranging local authority review of behaviour in its schools the focus and remit of this pupil referral unit was changed from 1 September 2013, when it also took its new name.
- Its role now is to take pupils from Key Stages 1 and 2 who are at risk of permanent exclusion, or already permanently excluded. Previously it took students from Key Stages 1 to 3. Other than in exceptional circumstances they remain for a period of up to 15 weeks, the centre acting as an assessment and intervention centre before the pupils are re-integrated into a mainstream school.
- Other than permanently excluded pupils, attendance is for the morning or the afternoon session, the pupils remaining on the registers of their mainstream schools during their period at the centre.
- When permanently excluded pupils are admitted on a full-time basis there is a re-integration plan into a named mainstream school in place from the start.
- The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium (additional government funding for certain pupils, such as those known to be eligible for free school meals, or in the care of the local authority) is well above average. Funding is shared with the pupil's mainstream school, except for those attending the centre full time.
- Following the restructuring, a new executive headteacher, who is also headteacher at one of the local authority's special schools where some of the pupils display challenging behaviour, was appointed to the centre in September 2013. A new lead teacher, who previously worked with the inclusion mentor team, takes day-to-day responsibility. This commenced in November 2013, when the centre transferred to its current premises.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise standards in writing to those already found in reading and mathematics by:
  - providing opportunities for developing pupils' skills of speaking and listening
  - creating more opportunities for topic or themed work that promote extended writing.
- Strengthen links with mainstream schools in order to enable:
  - mainstream staff to learn from the expertise in behaviour management that exists in the centre
  - centre staff to observe good primary school practice and share opportunities to assess the quality of pupils' work
  - the centre to gain a long-term view of its effectiveness in supporting re-integration of pupils into mainstream schools.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils is good

- Pupils join the centre as a result of their very challenging behaviour. Because they have found it hard to focus on learning, their attainment, including that in English and mathematics, is well below that expected for pupils of their age.
- As a result of effective teaching and support, many quickly start to make good progress. Until the centre was restructured it was easier to show the impact over time, since more attended for longer periods. From their low starting points, the progress of many accelerates quickly and starts to narrow the gap in attainment.
- The most able, show rapid progress as their engagement in learning is strengthened successfully.
- The progress of pupils with wider medical or learning difficulties is often limited by their capacity to learn. Part of the wider provision made by the local authority enables these pupils to go on to special school where it is appropriate. They do not make such rapid progress but remain well supported and engage in the whole range of learning activities.
- With pupils, other than those permanently excluded, now attending the centre for half of each day for up to 15 weeks, the centre works alongside mainstream schools to support progress and achievement. From baselines showing current levels in English and mathematics when they start, and again when they finish, it is clear that the centre continues to have a very positive impact on learning, with improvement in outcomes also including more positive behaviour.
- Learning is supported through the local authority's behaviour mentor team, who sometimes help pupils during their joint placement and always during the period when they are first fully re-integrated. This gives pupils a good opportunity of succeeding in the long term where they have previously failed.
- It is too early for the centre to have developed a clear verdict on its long-term impact in sustaining placements. Mainstream headteachers who have re-integrated pupils believe that improved achievement is sustained, while behaviour is no longer the great challenge it had been previously.
- The small number of permanently excluded pupils who are potentially in the centre for longer before they re-join mainstream education also re-engage in learning and make equally good progress.
- There is no difference between the performance of different groups, such as boys and girls, or those supported by the pupil premium. Because pupil numbers are so small the centre is able to provide for the specific needs of every individual, so all are able to learn in a way that meets their needs. Much of the pupil premium funding is used to support the costs of re-integration and this is proving effective in helping these pupils do well, narrowing the gap between their performance and that of the rest.
- Over time standards in writing have been lower than those in reading and mathematics. This is because they do not do enough extended writing. The centre's improvement plan has made this a priority for improvement.

- Reading is promoted well and the use of phonics (letters and the sounds they make) supports younger pupils' progress effectively. The centre uses the same reading scheme as that found in the majority of pupils' mainstream schools, so there is continuity in provision.
- The additional primary school sport funding is given entirely to the mainstream schools.

### **The quality of teaching** is good

- Over time good teaching has been at the heart of the re-engagement of pupils in learning and the teaching team remains the same following the restructuring, much teaching continuing to be good. Teachers generally have high expectations and form positive relationships with pupils, building a strong rapport so that all are encouraged to do their best. This also reflects a good commitment to providing equality of opportunity.
- Learning is promoted as a positive thing to do and pupils respond well, developing new skills across a range of topics and subjects. However, they do not always get enough opportunities to write at length and this is reflected in the fact that skills in writing lag behind those in reading and mathematics.
- Teaching assistants play an extremely important part in the re-engagement of pupils, as do the local authority behaviour mentors when they provide support. Adults work together effectively to provide individualised help that enables pupils to experience success in their learning in all subjects, including English and mathematics, sometimes for the first time. This also helps teachers to change the focus of their lessons if they realise that learning is not going very well, so that pupils can be quickly got back onto task.
- Good relationships encourage positive discussions which enable pupils to grow in confidence about their own ability. They are willing to have a go and sometimes make mistakes but this also allows them to produce some good work. From looking at the work in their books it is clear that pupils are engaged in learning and making good progress.
- Teachers ask penetrating questions and pupils enjoy responding. This not only shows that they are understanding but also helps them to think more deeply about what they are doing. However, teachers do not always take every opportunity to develop pupils' skills of speaking and listening. Work is often supported through the good use of interactive whiteboards in each of the two classrooms.
- Lessons have clear learning objectives and expected outcomes, including a statement on how they will help narrow the attainment gap. Work is marked regularly in a way that supports improvement in the future. Pupils also assess their own grasp of topics covered in class through marking it using a 'traffic lights' approach – red, amber or green for how well they have understood.
- At times, behaviour can be challenging but because pupils enjoy the work they are set they are happy to work through any distractions, which are dealt with quickly and with little fuss by the adults.

### **The behaviour and safety of pupils** are good

- The need to help pupils to transform their behaviour is at the heart of the work of the centre. The executive headteacher has drafted a new policy that has increased focus on helping

students to take greater acceptance of responsibility for their own behaviour over time, although its introduction has been very recent and it is too soon to evaluate its full impact.

- The centre has shown its expertise in re-engaging disaffected pupils and helping them to adopt far more positive attitudes. By the time they return to mainstream or special school they are much more positive about learning. They also show much better social skills such as the ability to share, work together and understand other people's points of view.
- The promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is effective and such developments reflect the particular strengths of this social element.
- Pupils say they feel safe and because they develop good relationships with staff they are able to say if things are worrying them, both in school and in wider contexts.
- In such a small setting the pupils say that bullying is not an issue and it would be difficult with such a high proportion of adults to pupils. Bullying is an important topic in personal and social education, pupils being made aware of the different types, including cyber-bullying and the dangers of misusing social networking sites for the older pupils.
- Attendance is just above the national average, standing at 96%. This reflects the positive engagement of pupils in the centre, underpinning their successful re-engagement in learning.

### **The leadership and management are good**

- The executive headteacher has successfully overseen the implementation of the restructuring of the provision and the move to the new site. The lead teacher, who started when the move took place six weeks ago, has already displayed effective leadership skills in setting up new procedures and starting to make sure that the centre can be successful in its new role as an assessment and intervention centre. Much has been achieved in a short time while the quality of education has not been negatively affected.
- The headteacher, lead teacher and local authority show a clear vision based on the commitment to help the centre's pupils to be successful, working in close collaboration with other schools. There are plans to develop joint working between staff of the centre and other schools so that both groups can benefit from the expertise of the other. It is early days and plans have yet to be fully implemented.
- There is effective checking of teaching, planning and marking, and these all contribute to effective arrangements for the management of staff performance. Challenging objectives support professional development within the new context and help the centre meet its identified areas for development.
- The new leadership team is supporting the wider local authority plan to make sure that pupils with challenging behaviour can be supported and helped to succeed. In return the local authority provides expertise and resources to support the strong development of the centre in its new role.
- The curriculum is based on helping pupils improve their core skills in English and mathematics, while filling the gaps in prior knowledge and understanding. At the same time it seeks to engage pupils in studying themes and topics that will interest them and is successful in this.
- Careful planning has gone into the re-structuring of provision for pupils with behaviour

difficulties across the whole of the local authority. It has enabled the centre to set priorities for development as the new system develops, with general support from headteachers and governing bodies of schools throughout the authority.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- All of the authority's three pupil referral units have a single management committee. Its members, including representative primary and secondary school headteachers, and senior local authority education professionals, bring together a range of relevant expertise. They carry out duties based firmly on those of mainstream school governing bodies and are in a strong position to challenge, while also being very supportive. They have been very involved in the restructuring of provision and have a good knowledge of its nature as well as of the quality of teaching and the nature of what is being taught. Financial monitoring includes the use of the pupil premium, which is focused on supporting successful re-integration. Challenging targets are set for the executive headteacher, and committee members are well aware of the links between teacher's pay and their performance when considering the recommendations from a headteacher. Safeguarding is a high priority and a focus for every meeting. The committee ensures that the local authority, which has legal responsibility for the provision in pupil referral units, carries out all its legal responsibilities.

## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	123349
<b>Local authority</b>	Telford and Wrekin
<b>Inspection number</b>	429964

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Pupil referral unit
<b>School category</b>	Pupil referral unit
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	11
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The local authority
<b>Chair</b>	Sian Deane
<b>Headteacher</b>	Gill Knox
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	8 June 2011
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