

Cheltenham and Tewkesbury Pupil Referral Services

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	135329
Local Authority	Gloucestershire
Inspection number	329080
Inspection date	11 February 2009
Reporting inspector	Patricia Potheary

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)	88
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Headteacher	Michael Buist
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	St George's Centre Alstone Lane Cheltenham GL51 8HH
Telephone number	01242 581519
Fax number	01242 578836

Age group	5–16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Cheltenham and Tewkesbury Pupil Referral Unit accepts pupils who have been permanently excluded, temporarily excluded or are in danger of being excluded from their mainstream schools. A minority, particularly in the younger age groups, are supported in returning to their mainstream school or college, therefore many pupils are dual registered. Pupils remain in the unit for as little as a few days or, in a few cases, for up to two or three years. Most pupils have emotional, social and behavioural difficulties. Many have underachieved in the past and a very small minority of pupils have additional difficulties with learning. Almost all pupils are from White British origins. The unit opened in September 2007 and is a reorganisation of two previously existing pupil referral units. Pupils in Key Stage 4 are on one site at the St George's Centre and those in Key Stages 1 to 3 are on another at the Rodney Road Centre. Currently there are no pupils under the age of seven. The unit manager was appointed in January 2008. The unit is part of a wider service, providing support to pupils and schools in Cheltenham and Tewkesbury, which is run by the unit managers.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Cheltenham and Tewkesbury is a good pupil referral unit. It is successful in helping pupils overcome a variety of difficulties which have prevented them from learning in the past. For most it transforms their life, changing their attitude to education and enabling them to achieve well and become confident about their prospects in the future. Standards are well below national averages in all age groups, owing to the nature of pupils' difficulties. Nevertheless pupils of all ages and abilities make good progress and a large majority of those aged 14 to 16 achieve five or more GCSEs and other qualifications. A considerable minority of pupils return to their mainstream schools or to colleges, where they continue to succeed. The unit's success results from good leadership and strong, dedicated teaching, where all staff are committed to providing the best possible opportunities for these young people to start afresh.

Pupils' behaviour in classes and around the two centres is excellent and is testament to how safe they feel and the positive attitudes they have towards each other and staff. For many this is a remarkable change. Pupils particularly like the way 'everyone talks to each other and staff treat us with respect'. Their good personal development and enjoyment of lessons are also evident in the significant improvement most of them make in their attendance. Teachers have a good knowledge of their subjects. There is a new and very good system for assessing work and making sure that lessons are matched well to pupils' different needs. However, not all teachers use this system effectively and a small minority of lessons lack challenge. For those doing GCSEs, the level of challenge is usually very good. Pupils are exceptionally well cared for and the support and guidance they receive are good overall.

The purpose-built accommodation is very good for pupils aged 14 to 16, but space is inadequate on the site for those in the 5 to 14 age group. This inhibits curricular development in specialist subjects and prevents outdoor activity from taking place as a matter of course during the day. The unit manager is currently seeking improved accommodation for pupils aged 5 to 14.

A great deal has been achieved since January 2008, particularly in developing a robust system to accurately assess the needs and abilities of pupils when they arrive. This enables unit staff to quickly begin to build on what pupils already know and want to achieve and also provide a curriculum that meets their needs well. Since September 2008 this has enabled very accurate target setting and tracking of the progress pupils are making. Unit leaders have used this to support effective self-evaluation, but they do not look in enough detail at how well different groups of pupils are performing in order to quickly identify those at risk of underachieving. They recognise this as the most important next step in continuing to improve the progress being made in all classes.

Parents are very positive about the unit, and especially the way their children are becoming enthusiastic about learning and the support they receive. With strong improvement to their basic skills, their attitudes to learning and respect for others, alongside a good range of qualifications by the age of 16, pupils are well prepared for the next steps in their education and careers.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that assessment is used effectively by all teachers in their planning to take learning forward at a challenging pace.

- Ensure that senior leaders use the information gathered on pupils' progress to provide a clearer overview of which groups are doing well and where improvement is most needed.
- Work with the local authority to improve accommodation for pupils in the 5 to 14 age group.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils make good progress in the core subjects of English, mathematics, science and information and communication technology (ICT) in all age groups. When they first begin to learn, progress is often very rapid as pupils catch up on lost ground. This was particularly evident for pupils aged 7 to 14 during the autumn term. For those taking GCSEs, progress and achievement are outstanding compared to similar pupil referral units, and a large majority gain five or more GCSEs including English and mathematics. A few pupils are helped to achieve a good number of A–C grades, demonstrating strong progress. For a small minority the pace of learning is slower and for those few who do not enjoy academic subjects, opportunities to achieve in a different way are too limited. The unit recognises this and has begun to broaden the type of courses offered to meet this need. The majority of those who stay on until they are 16 successfully go on to college or employment.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

For almost all pupils, arriving at the unit is a life-changing event that helps set them on the path to future success. Significantly they begin to realise that learning can be fun and rewarding. They develop a strong moral and social awareness and frequently experience a keen spiritual sense of the wonders around them, for example when hill walking. Pupils' tolerance and understanding of people who come from different backgrounds, religions or other countries is well developed. Attendance varies widely because of the constantly changing pupil population but is satisfactory overall. For those who stay for any length of time, attendance is good. Pupils also acquire a good understanding of how to stay healthy and safe. They are keen on healthy eating and the older ones produced an excellent meal of lasagne, salad and fresh fruit flan for themselves and staff during the inspection. Pupils talk frequently about the respect that they find at the unit and they respond to this well by showing responsibility, looking after one another and caring for the environment. They also help to interview new staff and enjoy walking dogs for the local animal centre, for example. Staff realise that such activities are too few for all pupils to make more than a satisfactory contribution to the community and plan to broaden the range of opportunities available. Above all, pupils at the unit learn to take pride in their achievements and want to do well.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

There are many strengths in teaching and, for pupils of all age groups and abilities, learning is usually good. Lessons are well planned to support pupils' different needs and teachers and teaching assistants provide skilled, sensitive individual support. It is this close attention to their needs that pupils appreciate most. Work is carefully assessed and pupils in most classes are familiar with their targets and how they need to improve. The majority of teachers ensures this happens to provide a good level of challenge and to encourage effort which is sometimes

outstanding. In a few lessons this is not the case and pupils' progress is satisfactory rather than good as a result. Teachers use technology well to help pupils find information and to demonstrate particular points. In one lesson, for example, a video clip sparked a thoughtful discussion about the motives of the different characters in Shakespeare's Othello. The atmosphere in lessons is enjoyable, with an evident mutual respect between pupils and staff.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Staff work hard to match the curriculum to the constantly changing needs of the pupils. Very clear pathways for all pupils, based upon thorough gathering of information about their needs and interests, are mapped out when they arrive. Staff link very well with other providers to increase and develop the range of opportunities and courses offered. With short- and longer-term placements in four key stages and an emphasis on returning pupils to the mainstream, there is a high pupil turnover. This means that the curriculum is always developing. For a few pupils, there is not sufficient breadth of opportunity in the courses offered, but this is rapidly changing. Alternative provision off-site is increasing so that far more pupils can find something to interest and inspire them. There is also a high quality 'virtual learning' programme where pupils even attend during the evening to follow courses on line.

Accommodation for pupils aged 5 to 14 at the Rodney Road Centre is very cramped, limiting the capacity to extend the on-site curriculum in science, art, design and technology, and above all physical education. Younger pupils in particular have very little opportunity to learn or play outside during the day. Staff have responded imaginatively with, for example, plenty of off-site sport and daily 'huff and puff' activities. The situation remains inadequate, although plans are developing to provide alternative premises for those aged 5 to 14. Pupils are prepared well for their future lives through a wide range of activities including adult literacy, numeracy and ICT qualifications for the older ones, and extensive work experience and high quality vocational studies. The unit provides an excellent programme of visits, visitors, projects and other events to bring learning alive, including residential and outward-bound activities and the Duke of Edinburgh award. This rich variety of additional activities underpins and strengthens relationships between staff and pupils, and also encourages pupils to interact regularly and positively with members of the public, supporting good community relations.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Procedures to safeguard pupils meet requirements. Actions to improve behaviour are very effective leading to a good productive learning environment in lessons, and bullying is extremely rare. Pupils feel very safe because of this. The care given to supporting pupils with their personal needs and difficulties is excellent. This includes exceptionally good links with other agencies, parents and schools. This is particularly effective in helping pupils when they join and to prepare them for the next stage of their education. The very few who experience additional learning difficulties are identified right away and effective support is given to them. The guidance given to help pupils to reach high standards is good. The system used is excellent, with extensive identification and assessment of needs, aspirational target setting and thorough monitoring of progress. This system is very new, however, and a few teachers have not yet developed the skills necessary to use it effectively. For a few pupils this results in satisfactory rather than good progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The unit's accurate self-evaluation leads to good improvements in academic and personal progress for pupils. The range of information gathered is extensive, in response to the complexity of the provision. With data only being available for the autumn term 2008, senior leaders have not begun to look in detail at how well different groups of pupils are progressing. This means that although priorities for improvement are appropriate, they are broad and lack detail concerning which pupil groups perform exceptionally well and which need to do better. However, the senior team are well aware of this and its importance in securing continued improvement. They are now in a position to begin more detailed analysis.

The new unit manager has acted very effectively to put systems into place so that improvement can be well directed and more efficient. These systems are of high quality, enabling a stronger team approach across the two sites. As a result pupils are more engaged in lessons and the older ones are on track to achieve more qualifications in a wider range of subjects. The group of pupils taking the new vocationally related qualifications and wider key skills are attending more frequently than in previous years. With clearer and more realistic targets, pupils in all key stages are moving on more rapidly, making up to two years' progress in one term in some cases. There is a good capacity to continue improving.

The unit is clearly successful in helping pupils to fit more easily into their own communities, behave more acceptably and be more tolerant in their views, and it evaluates progress in these areas very well. The unit's programme to further promote wider community relations is at an early stage of development, and is satisfactory overall. There are already, however, some good examples of work to increase pupils' understanding of other faiths and cultures.

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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	NA
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	4
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	3
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	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**

12 February 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Cheltenham and Tewkesbury Pupil Referral Unit, Cheltenham GL51 8HH

Thank you for being so welcoming when we visited the St George's and Rodney Road centres. We very much enjoyed meeting you, joining you for lunch and seeing some of your lessons. They are good centres, with many interesting things going on, just as you described. Senior staff work hard to keep developing opportunities for you and, for this reason, the standards you reach and the progress you make are improving.

Skilled teaching helps you to make good progress in your lessons. As a result, you do well in all your subjects, but particularly English, mathematics, science and ICT. We like the way you really enjoy your work and always try to do your best. You told us that your teachers make lessons enjoyable and interesting and we can see that they help you do as well as you can. We have, though, asked them to make sure all of you make good progress by consistently matching lesson activities to your differing needs and rates of learning. We also want senior staff to monitor progress for different groups so that they can be sure that you are all doing well regardless of your age, ability or subject preferences. We are sure that you will discuss this with staff and help them by working hard and sharing your ideas.

A good curriculum helps you to make good progress in your social and personal skills. You were keen to tell us that the unit also keep you safe and looks after you very well. It is therefore very pleasing to see that you are helping yourselves by taking plenty of exercise and eating a healthy diet. Your behaviour is excellent, especially in the way you value learning and respect others, including those who have different beliefs and ways of living. The staff do well to make up for the limited accommodation for those of you aged 5 to 14, but we have asked the unit to try to improve the facilities so that you can have better access to practical subjects.

The changes you make in wanting to learn and prepare for the future are impressive, particularly in the way most of you attend every day and make so much effort in your work. It is good to know that you feel that staff take your views seriously and that you can make a difference. You clearly enjoy coming to the centres. We think that these things, alongside your good quality basic skills and mature attitudes, will help prepare you well for the next stage of your education and careers.

Yours faithfully

Patricia Potheary Lead inspector