

The Bridge Centre

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	135777
Local Authority	Darlington
Inspection number	341698
Inspection dates	21–22 June 2010
Reporting inspector	Clive Petts

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	14–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	74
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	4
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Pat Armstrong
Headteacher	Mrs Liz Hemingway
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	McMullen House Yarm Road Darlington DL1 1ED
Telephone number	01325 468395
Fax number	
Email address	Liz.Hemingway@darlington.gov.uk

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Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester M2 7LA

T: 08456 404045

Textphone: 0161 618 8524

E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 11 lessons, observing eight staff teach in the main base, Home and Hospital Teaching Service (HHTS) base and in the Memorial hospital. Meetings were held with officers of the local authority, the managers of The Bridge and the HHTS, staff and groups of students and parents. An inspector spoke by telephone with the chair of the management committee. The inspection team sampled students' work and looked at documentation including policies on safeguarding, development plans, staff lesson planning, assessment files and records of pupils' progress, including individual education plans. Questionnaires completed by staff and pupils and three questionnaires and one email returned from parents and carers were read and analysed.

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

- the effectiveness of safeguarding procedures and practices
- how well students achieve, their rates of progress and how positively they re-engage in their learning
- how much their behaviour, attitudes to learning and attendance improve
- how effectively staff personalise learning activities to ensure successful progression to further education, employment or training
- the effectiveness of leadership and management on the outcomes and destinations of students.

Information about the school

The Bridge is part of the Education other than Schools Service within the local authority. From January 2009, it has operated on three sites as a pupil referral unit specialising in alternative provision. The provision also incorporates the HHTS and Traveller re-engagement. In addition to the main site, the HHTS operates from two different sites including the local hospital. In the long term absence of the headteacher, a local authority lead officer provides line management for the Bridge and HHTS managers. The provision caters for students from a wide range of backgrounds and with varied needs. This includes those disengaged and at risk from exclusion from mainstream schools, those students in hospital, anxious school refusers, students with medical needs and Traveller students attending the main site part time and Electively Home Educated (EHE) for the remainder of the time. Many have previously experienced significant interruptions to their learning. Currently, there are 63 students enrolled at the main site and 11 with the HHTS. There are four students in Year 12. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is average. Two-thirds of the students are from a White British background with one-third from a Gypsy Roma heritage. A very small number are looked after by the local authority. Very few students have special educational needs and/or disabilities and none has a statement of special educational needs.

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?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

The Bridge provides a satisfactory and improving education for its students. Students are positively re-engaging in their learning and making satisfactory progress to acquire a broad range of skills. In the HHTS, nearly all students make at least good progress as a result of effective, lively teaching. The very positive engagement of parents and carers is indicative of the confidence and trust that exists. They report that their children make good progress managing their behaviour and controlling their anxieties as they become more confident and self-assured.

Overall attainment is broadly average. Although taken as a whole, students make satisfactory progress; it is often uneven, especially in their literacy and numeracy, despite some good opportunities to use basic skills in practical subjects. For example, HHTS students make consistently good progress, achieve well to attain above average GCSE standards in English and mathematics but at the main site there is a pattern of slower progress, satisfactory achievement and broadly average attainment. Traveller students make satisfactory progress and often achieve well, although gaps in their learning do hold back attainment. Students whose circumstances have made them vulnerable and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities make similar progress to their friends.

Staff make their expectations clear for routines and behaviour. Consequently, behaviour is good. Students report that they feel safe, display a good grasp of how to stay safe and most say bullying is rare. Opportunities for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development provide a good basis for students to work together and respond positively to the good advice and guidance they receive. Overall, the quality of teaching is satisfactory and improving. Where expectations are highest, students' earlier often negative experiences of school are quickly overcome. The use of assessment is satisfactory but variable. Some good use is made of progress information to personalise learning and give guidance for improvement, particularly where progress checking systems are embedded. Good enrichment is provided to give relevance, challenge and build on achievement, for example, expeditions in ice and snow to develop team working and support an Army career application. The good care, guidance and support enable all students to add to their confidence and increase self-worth.

Despite the unsettled leadership, day-to-day management is effective. Evaluation judgements correctly identify strengths and improvement issues, although rigorous self-evaluation is at an early stage of development. Nevertheless, there are good instances of the impact of planned actions on outcomes. For example, developing vocational programmes are increasing student enjoyment, accelerating their rate of progress and boosting achievement. Reinvigorated management committee leadership

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acknowledges that more robust accountability is an essential ingredient for accelerating the provision's development. Consequently, the capacity for sustained improvement is judged to be satisfactory.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the effectiveness of the provision by:
 - ensuring the management committee scrutinises and holds the provision to account for all that it does
 - making sure managers complete systematic and rigorous self-evaluation to measure the impact of all actions and identify areas for improvement.
- Raise the achievement and rates of progress in literacy and numeracy by:
 - raising the expectations of what students can achieve in literacy and numeracy lessons
 - ensuring all activities present appropriate challenge and pace
 - making certain staff always use assessment information to inform their lesson planning and provide students with clear guidance for improvement.
- About 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Nearly all students respond encouragingly to the warm, friendly atmosphere on all three sites and the skilled, sensitive support they receive. In lessons and off-site, behaviour is normally sensible and responsible. Students respond well to tough challenges and take pride in their achievements, happily explaining their feats, for example when digging a snow hole for shelter and protection or planning and preparing a meal for a family buffet in the cafeteria.

Across the provision the range of attainment is wide. Many start with below expected skills for their age largely due to earlier disruption or complete disengagement from education. While overall progress is satisfactory, HHTS students make good progress and attain well once they settle into routines. They are given challenging targets and strive hard to achieve them, for example, in science. Pragmatic initiatives add to the relevance of what they study, for example completing certified practical first aid and manual lifting training. This all helps to make them better equipped for employment or further study.

The students acquire a satisfactory understanding of what they need to do to keep fit, healthy and avoid the dangers of drinking, smoking or using illegal substances. Positive support and encouragement help individual students cope with their anxieties and fears as well as improving their attitudes and behaviour. All share in each other's achievements each morning, making a good contribution to their community. Students

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make good progress acquiring life skills to enable them to better manage their lifestyle. Although below average overall, the attendance of a majority of students improves significantly as they commit themselves to their education. As a result, they are prepared satisfactorily for leaving the provision.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
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	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	4
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Teaching adopts practical and relevant approaches which engage students and most lessons provided are at least a satisfactory match to their needs and interests. Increased use of lively approaches and first-hand experiences are underpinning improvements in the quality of learning. In lessons when teaching is lively and interesting, students are keen to respond to the challenges that are set. They often become engrossed when teaching challenges their thinking. When demands are less exacting and expectations blurred, students becomes less focused and the quality of work falls. In some literacy and numeracy lessons, limited challenge slows progress and attainment dips, for example in the quality of their writing. When routines for working are made clear, students adopt mature approaches and work hard to achieve their targets. As a result,

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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enjoyment rises. Work is marked regularly but explicit, helpful pointers for improvement are not consistently provided. Support staff make valuable contributions to the student's teaching and learning, including for the vulnerable and Traveller students.

The curriculum makes a very significant contribution to the students' personal development and enjoyment, despite the limited number of specialist teachers. Well-planned catering, building construction, outdoor pursuits, and personal and social education opportunities are in place. All courses are accredited, with clear routes for students to return to mainstream school or access further education, training and employment. This forms a crucial part of the momentum to provide positive experiences and give students the confidence and skills to manage their own future. However, the provision for basic skills such as literacy and numeracy is too variable.

Staff know students and their families really well and provide good, and in individual cases exceptional, help and guidance. Staff ensure all are included. Strong links with the Traveller community are particularly successful in re-engaging families with education. Students are given good opportunities to socialise with friends and adults, including visitors in the relaxed, friendly atmosphere. Well organised procedures, including close monitoring and prompt follow-up, are in place to tackle persistent absence, consolidate improvements in attendance and continue to reduce the number of students not in education.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
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	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Despite unsettled senior leadership, managers are successfully motivating staff to push forward and maintain improvements. Once identified, areas of weakness in teaching and learning are tackled systematically. For example, the teaching of literacy and numeracy is currently being strengthened in the main site. Skilled monitoring by the local authority lead officer and managers are contributing well to improvements such as personalising accredited courses. Highly effective use is made of a consultant to verify the quality of all vocational courses.

The management committee have a satisfactory overview of how the provision operates. Close scrutiny and checking the effectiveness of the provision's work are at an early stage of development following recent changes in the committee's composition. There are some very good links with local schools, the local hospital children's ward, the local college and private providers. Safeguarding procedures meet all current regulations

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with policies and practices in line with requirements.

Work with support agencies and medical specialists is a strength and is effective in reducing the risks to individual students. Managers work effectively to keep parents and carers informed and to resolve any worries or concerns they may have. Social events arranged and managed by students extend opportunities for all families to come together and celebrate their children's achievements. The normally relaxed, harmonious atmosphere throughout the Bridge, with mutual respect between students and adults evident, illustrates the commitment to equal opportunities. The Bridge makes a satisfactory contribution to community cohesion with strength in its local community links. Pupils' understanding of ethnic diversity, both nationally and globally, is developing satisfactorily.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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

Sixth form

The sixth form provides a satisfactory quality of education which is competently and sensitively managed. Students 'not yet ready' for further education, employment or training respond positively to the individual programmes which nurture their confidence and skills to enable them to achieve success regardless of destination. Overall attainment is broadly average with all making satisfactory progress. The students are really well cared for and receive good guidance, including advice from the Connexions service, to enable them to make appropriate choices for the future and become mature adults

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These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	3
The quality of provision in the sixth form	3
Leadership and management of the sixth form	3

Views of parents and carers

Three questionnaires were returned by parents and carers. Five parents spoke to the inspectors and one parent emailed her views. One said, 'If my child did not come, I strongly believe she would not be coping with education and definitely not doing any GCSEs, and another added, 'He couldn't fit in at school and now he manages himself'. Comments were very positive indicating a good level of satisfaction with the work of the Bridge. The inspection team findings agree with the views that the provision makes a successful contribution addressing the needs and interests of students and helping them to manage to 'reconnect and stick' with their education.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at The Bridge 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 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 3 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 56 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	1	33	2	67	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	2	67	1	33	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	1	33	2	67	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	1	33	2	67	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	2	67	1	33	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	2	67	1	33	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	1	33	2	67	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)	2	67	1	33	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	2	67	1	33	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	3	100	0	0	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	3	100	0	0	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	3	100	0	0	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	3	100	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 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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	51	45	0	4
Primary schools	6	41	42	10
Secondary schools	8	34	44	14
Sixth forms	10	37	50	3
Special schools	32	38	25	5
Pupil referral units	12	43	31	14
All schools	9	40	40	10

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above is for the period 1 September to 31 December 2009 and is the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn term 2009 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

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>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. 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 pupil's 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.



23 June 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of The Bridge, Darlington, DL1 1ED

I want to thank all of you for the friendly welcome that you gave the inspectors when we inspected The Bridge. We thoroughly enjoyed our time with you including our visits to the Home and Hospital base and the children's ward at Memorial Hospital.

We were impressed by your sensible and responsible behaviour in lessons and in the cafeteria. The Bridge provides a satisfactory and improving quality of education where the staff take good care of you. As a result, you obviously feel relaxed and safe whether at the main site, off-site or in one of the Home and Hospital bases. You are clearly aware of the importance of managing your own behaviour and any worries or concerns effectively. You can be proud of your improving achievements. Many of you told me how the staff work hard to make your learning relevant and interesting. You make at least satisfactory progress in your work and obviously enjoy lessons that are practical and appealing. Some very good use is made of the many links the Bridge has with specialist help and support staff, local schools and the off-site providers such as the college.

I have asked the senior leader's and management committee to look at ways of improving the quality of what is provided for you in The Bridge. This will ensure that your literacy and numeracy skills improve more rapidly so that you achieve more success. I have also asked that your lessons are even more demanding, yet interesting, and that you are given firm guidance as to how you can improve the quality of your work.

You can play your part by continuing to work as hard as you can. Thank you for helping with this inspection. I hope The Bridge will continue to improve.

I wish you all a bright future.

Yours sincerely

Mr Clive Petts

Lead inspector

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