

# First Base

34 Ashley Downs, Lowestoft, NR32 4EX

**Inspection dates** 8–9 October 2014

|                                |                      |             |          |
|--------------------------------|----------------------|-------------|----------|
| <b>Overall effectiveness</b>   | Previous inspection: | Good        | 2        |
|                                | This inspection:     | <b>Good</b> | <b>2</b> |
| Leadership and management      |                      | Good        | 2        |
| Behaviour and safety of pupils |                      | Good        | 2        |
| Quality of teaching            |                      | Good        | 2        |
| Achievement of pupils          |                      | Good        | 2        |
| Early years provision          |                      | Good        | 2        |

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school.

- The unit's leadership team sets high standards for its work and ensures that provision and outcomes are improving continuously.
- Pupils work hard in lessons and achieve well over time. This is because there is good support for pupils' social, behavioural and emotional development. This helps pupils to become ready for, and actively engage with, their learning.
- Good teaching and highly effective support for pupils' personal development contribute to the good progress pupils make in English, especially reading, and mathematics.
- Staff have a very good understanding of the pupils' individual educational needs. They are skilled in providing the right kind of support for different categories of special need.
- Pupils gain a huge sense of personal achievement when they succeed in their learning. They enjoy successes enormously and their sense of pride in themselves is very evident.
- Pupils are happy and feel very safe in the unit, and parents agree. This reflects the exceptionally good care provided by staff in the unit. During their time at the unit pupils learn to understand more about their own behaviour and how to manage it better.
- Provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage is good. Children have good access to practical activities both inside and outdoors.
- The acting headteacher has managed recent changes to staffing well. Good standards of teaching have not only been maintained but are being improved upon. The acting headteacher has established excellent relationships with parents and local primary schools.
- The management committee has a good understanding of the unit's work. It has played an active role in the development of a recent federation with two other local pupil referral units.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teaching is not outstanding yet because occasionally pupils are kept waiting for work and more-able pupils are not challenged enough.
- When work is marked, it is not always clear what pupils need to do to improve.
- Staff do not take every opportunity to promote pupils' use of literacy.
- Members of the management committee are not quite as secure in interpreting progress data as they are other information about the unit's performance.

### Information about this inspection

- The inspector carried out five lesson observations, including two which were conducted jointly with the headteacher and executive headteacher. The inspector also made several shorter visits to lessons.
- The inspector held meetings with the headteacher, members of the Management Committee, a representative from the local authority, teachers and support staff.
- A telephone conversation was held with the headteacher of a local primary school which uses the unit to support some of its pupils.
- Discussions were held with pupils informally during the inspection. Given the age range of the pupils and the reasons for them being at the unit, formal meetings were deemed to be inappropriate.
- While no parents responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, the unit was able to arrange for two parents to meet with the inspector.
- The inspector took account of eight Ofsted questionnaires completed by staff.
- The inspector looked at a range of documentation including the unit's self-evaluation summary, the improvement plan and data relating to pupils' attainment and progress.
- The inspector also looked at documents relating to the work of the management committee, behaviour and attendance records and the unit's arrangements for ensuring appropriate safeguarding arrangements are in place.

### Inspection team

Gulshanbir Kayembe, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- The unit caters for up to 12 pupils, between the ages of four and eight, who have significant social, emotional and behavioural needs. At the time of the inspection, there were no children in the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- Pupils attend the unit for two days a week, spending the other three days in their mainstream school. The unit has a responsibility to reintegrate pupils back into their mainstream schools on a full-time basis. Most pupils are in the unit for between two to three terms. Some require longer and, occasionally, some are able to return to school sooner on a full-time basis.
- The behaviour support staff assist pupils when they are in their mainstream school, as well as providing support to other pupils in primary schools who have behavioural needs but do not attend the unit.
- Typically all, or nearly all, pupils come from White British backgrounds. There are far more boys than girls in the unit.
- All pupils are supported at school action plus, have a statement of special educational needs or education, health and care plans. Many pupils have autism spectrum disorders, though not all have been diagnosed when they begin. Some have speech and language difficulties or attention deficit disorders.
- The unit does not currently receive any pupil premium funding, which is additional government funding for children in the care of the local authority and pupils known to be eligible for free school meals. The numbers of pupils known to be eligible for a free school meal and/or to be in the care of the local authority are very high.
- The unit also does not receive any primary school physical education and sport funding. This is government funding to encourage primary-aged pupils to become active and healthy.
- The unit has an acting headteacher, who has been in post for over two years. The unit became part of the North Suffolk Pupil Referral Partnership on the 1st September 2014. An executive headteacher took up post at the same time. The Federation is in the process of appointing a head of school who will take up post in January 2015 when the acting headteacher retires.
- There has been some instability in the teaching staff over the last six months.

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

- Improve the quality of teaching to outstanding by ensuring that:
  - more-able pupils are always provided with appropriate levels of challenge
  - pupils are not left waiting for work or help from staff while they work with others
  - written feedback provides pupils with a clear evaluation of how well they have achieved and clear guidance on how to improve their work.
- Develop leadership and management by ensuring that:
  - pupils' use of literacy is developed effectively through the teaching programmes
  - governors develop the ability to interpret progress data effectively.

## Inspection judgements

### The leadership and management are good

- The acting headteacher sets high expectations for teaching and learning. Consequently, staff are very clear about what is expected of them and there is a very positive atmosphere for learning. The unit's capacity for further improvement is good.
- The executive headteacher provides good support and guidance for the leadership of the unit. He has, in a short period of time, gained a good understanding of its effectiveness and where improvements are needed. He is working well with school staff and the management committee to promote further improvements. Plans include joint working with the other pupil referral units in the partnership. The federation has already helped the unit with administrative support.
- School leaders make regular checks to ensure that the school runs effectively. Systems for managing the performance of staff are well-established. Teachers' objectives for improving their practice are drawn from observations of their work and are linked well to how well they enable pupils to learn.
- The leadership team places high priority on good quality training and professional development so that the staff team is well-equipped to provide the right support and high quality teaching for their pupils. Pupils' progress is carefully tracked to ensure that they are making the progress that they should. Though the school receives no pupil premium funding, the progress of disadvantaged pupils is carefully checked. There are no gaps in the attainment and progress of these pupils compared with others in the school. The gaps between these pupils and all pupils nationally are closing.
- Subject leaders contribute effectively to the work of the unit. The unit makes good use of the range of skills that different staff members bring. The work in local primary schools is well co-ordinated and well managed.
- Very good attention is paid to equality of opportunity and no form of discrimination is tolerated. Staff are strong advocates for the rights of pupils with disabilities and those with special educational needs. They are passionate about enabling the pupils in the unit to make the progress needed to make the adjustment to a mainstream school environment. Pupils are carefully assessed so that teaching can focus on gaps in their prior learning and on their emotional and social development.
- The acting headteacher has ensured that there are strong relationships between pupils, their parents and the staff in the mainstream schools that pupils come from. As a result, pupils thrive at the unit.
- Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils are taught how to get along better with others and how to work together. Pupils develop confidence in themselves and their abilities, which helps to prepare them to be fully integrated back into their primary schools. It also helps to prepare them for life in modern Britain.
- The unit provides a good teaching programme which includes English and mathematics. The unit organises its teaching programmes so that subjects link in well with the work that pupils do when in their mainstream schools. Breakfast and lunch times are used well to promote important social skills.
- Themes, such as Traditional Tales, allow pupils to experience history, geography and learn about other cultures. This promotes pupils' literacy through all activities. However, opportunities are sometimes missed to extend pupils' writing or wider vocabulary.
- The outdoor area has improved since the last inspection. It provides pupils with a good space for physical activities and to play games led by staff. They enjoy these, benefiting physically and mentally from being active. The outdoor area is also a well-developed space to support the learning of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

- A nurture group helps those who are not ready for a more formal curriculum. Continuing to learn through play-based and sensory activities for part of the day helps children to make a gentler transition from Reception to Key Stage 1. It also means that the unit has a good range of resources and expertise to promote learning for the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- The local authority provides good support to the unit. It has organised training for staff and members of the management committee. It has also provided mentoring support for leadership and new teachers. The local authority has also been supporting the development of the federation.
- **The governance of the school:**
  - Members of the management committee are well informed about the work of the unit and they understand its key strengths and areas for development. They are closely involved in decisions about staff pay and rewarding good performance. Members know how issues in performance, on the rare occasions these arise, are dealt with.
  - The information the management committee receives prior to meetings is helping members to increasingly ask challenging questions about how well the unit is working. However, members are more reliant on staff to help them interpret data on pupils' progress than other data, such as information on attendance and behaviour. They ensure that safeguarding requirements are met. The Chair of the Management Committee undertakes an annual audit of arrangements jointly with the headteacher.

## The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

### Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. They are referred to the unit because of significant issues with behaviour in mainstream schools. Over time, behaviour improves as pupils learn to understand the effect it has on themselves and others. Pupils become more alert to the factors that may trigger an outburst of temper; they are able to take time out to cool down and then bring themselves back into the classroom ready to learn. The improvements in behaviour help to prepare pupils well for full-time mainstream education.
- Pupils enjoy coming to the unit and they are keen to do well. It is a delicate balance, however, as sometimes, if work appears to be a bit harder, pupils can react negatively. Nonetheless, parents talked about how their children look forward to coming to the unit, getting up and dressed without any prompting. This is reflected in their good attendance records.
- Pupils enjoy the interactions with others and learn to become more sensitive to the needs of their peers as well as the staff. They are very accepting of others regardless of their cultural, racial or religious backgrounds. Pupils learn to share and how to talk kindly to others. Pupils collaborate well. They gained tremendous pleasure, for example, from making bread. Most of them were willing to contribute the dough they had kneaded to make one large loaf of bread rather than their own small one. One or two pupils found this a little more difficult but did manage to do so in the end.

### Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding. Every consideration possible is given to pupils' safety in the unit. They are taught about how to keep themselves safe from harm. Pupils do valuable work on issues such as bullying so that they learn how to recognise and deal with bullying, and how they can make sure that they themselves are kind to others.
- Staff work with a wide range of agencies and partners, as well as parents, to ensure that pupils are kept safe. The work undertaken with families has helped parents to deal more effectively with difficult behaviour at home.
- Pupils are taught to assess risks accurately and considerable dialogue takes place to help them understand how their behaviour, if uncontrolled, can hurt others. Most importantly, pupils are encouraged to express their feelings in words and reminded to 'use your words' to articulate fears and anxiety as well as

frustration. This helps them to channel their feelings more appropriately.

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

- Teachers and the behaviour support assistants work in close partnership to address underlying behaviour issues and positively promote pupils' learning. They share teaching and behaviour plans and set clear objectives for learning, so that pupils make good progress, particularly in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Staff plan work carefully for each individual pupil. This means that, for most pupils, the work they are given is pitched well for their ability and helps to address important gaps in prior learning. Occasionally, work is a little too easy for more-able pupils, and pupils are sometimes left waiting because either they are not sure what to do or they have finished work and the teacher is with another pupil. This slows their learning.
- Tasks are well developed to help pupils practise key skills such as reading or writing. Staff make good use of practical equipment and resources to enable pupils to understand key ideas, especially in mathematics. Consequently, pupils' skills in number work, including adding up and taking away, are improving well. Staff are good at questioning pupils and engaging them in dialogue about their work. This is particularly the case when staff are working individually with a pupil.
- Work is well marked and staff set out very clearly what they expect pupils to have learned from each completed piece of work. Teachers assess how well these expectations have been achieved with pupils, who enjoy ticking off or highlighting the learning they have completed. However, sometimes, the next steps in learning are not clearly enough defined.
- Reading skills are taught well and pupils have daily sessions on learning letters and their sounds (phonics). They are encouraged to use their improving knowledge of letter sounds to help them to spell correctly as well as to help them to read. Staff skills in phonics are also used to help children in the Early Years, when the unit has them, with early reading skills.

### **The achievement of pupils** is good

- When they begin at the unit, many pupils have already fallen behind age-related expectations in the basic skills of literacy and numeracy. A few arrive with levels of attainment that are broadly in line with, or better than, age-related expectations, especially in mathematics.
- Pupils' behaviour when they begin has been a major barrier to their learning. However, staff deal with this very effectively so that pupils' attitudes to learning invariably become highly positive. For many, low levels of achievement in the past have led to low self-esteem and confidence levels.
- Pupils' confidence rises as they improve their skills in key areas and realise they can read, write and work with numbers. Overall, their progress accelerates and those with previous gaps in learning begin to catch up, especially in key areas of English and mathematics. Books show that pupils are productive and complete a good amount of work daily.
- Most pupils make particularly good progress in reading. They enjoy phonics and use their skills well to support the development of their reading and their writing. Pupils also make good progress in developing their speaking and listening skills. Some are very articulate, beyond their years, and able to express complex ideas exceptionally well.
- The small number of more-able pupils make good progress generally and move forward at a good pace to improve their attainment levels in English and mathematics, as well as other areas such as art and science. Occasionally, however, they are not stretched or challenged enough to extend their learning even more.

- Disadvantaged pupils make progress at a similar rate to others and there are no differences in the achievement of pupils based on their particular special educational need. Those with autism spectrum disorders are learning as well, for example, as those with speech and language needs.
- The unit successfully reintegrates the vast majority of pupils back into mainstream school. By that time, attainment levels are close to, or in line with, age-related expectations for the majority, and occasionally better. A very small number of pupils leave to go to more specialist provision or to move onto a pupil referral unit for Key Stage 2. The unit is working on longer-term tracking to see how successfully pupils remain in mainstream over the course of their statutory education.

### **The early years provision** is good

- The unit has good provision for children under five. The effective teaching of phonics to six and seven year-olds is an indication of the skills of staff to promote early reading among younger children. Similarly, the use of sand, for example, to practise letter writing, and daily story time for older pupils who still need to establish early reading, writing and mathematical knowledge are good indicators that younger children have access to provision that is appropriate to their ages and abilities.
- Data and books from previous years indicate that children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make good progress while at the unit.
- The good development of the outdoor area, which allows pupils to explore the outside world and also engage in physical activities, helps to ensure that younger children attending the unit are able to experience effective early years practice. Staff engage in role play with older pupils to show them how to participate in play. They read stories interactively, asking questions and sharing pictures. These are all good teaching skills for younger children. The sensory room adds to the good and very suitable provision for early years children.
- Staff are familiar with the early years curriculum and the assessment requirements. Past assessments show children under five have made good progress and become ready for Year 1. Staff work closely with all parents to share information and to encourage parents to tell them about their children's interests and progress and behaviour at home. The early years provision is well led and managed.

## 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> | 131822  |
| <b>Local authority</b>         | Suffolk |
| <b>Inspection number</b>       | 447982  |

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>                 | 4–8                            |
| <b>Gender of pupils</b>                    | Mixed                          |
| <b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b> | 12                             |
| <b>Appropriate authority</b>               | The local authority            |
| <b>Chair</b>                               | Margaret Durrant               |
| <b>Headteacher</b>                         | Gillian Lee                    |
| <b>Date of previous school inspection</b>  | 1 March 2012                   |
| <b>Telephone number</b>                    | 01502 512963                   |
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