



**Falkirk Day Unit
Falkirk Council
20 January 2009**

This report tells you about the quality of education at the school. We describe how children benefit from learning there. We explain how well they are doing and how good the school is at helping them to learn. Then we look at the ways in which the school does this. We describe how well the school works with other groups in the community, including parents¹ and services which support children. We also comment on how well staff and children work together and how they go about improving the school.

Our report describes the 'ethos' of the school. By 'ethos' we mean the relationships in the school, how well children are cared for and treated and how much is expected of them in all aspects of school life. Finally, we comment on the school's aims. In particular, we focus on how well the aims help staff to deliver high quality learning, and the impact of leadership on the school's success in achieving these aims.

If you would like to learn more about our inspection of the school, please visit www.hmie.gov.uk. Here you can find analyses of questionnaire returns. Where applicable, you will also be able to find descriptions of good practice in the school.

¹ Throughout this report, the term 'parents' should be taken to include foster carers, residential care staff and carers who are relatives or friends.

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1. The school

The Falkirk Day Unit is a non-denominational service for young people with additional support needs. Pupils' additional support needs arise from factors linked to family circumstances and emotional and behavioural difficulties. Young people who attend the unit are from the Falkirk area. Until recently, secondary aged young people attended the unit on a part-time basis. The education authority has redefined the unit's role so that the focus is now on providing full-time education for young people from S3 and above. The inspection took place in November 2008 at which time the roll was 19. All young people at the unit receive free meals. Young people's attendance has been below the national average but is now improving. Exclusions are well below the national average.

2. Particular strengths of the school

- The very positive and trusting relationships between staff and the young people.
- The exceptional support which senior managers provide to both staff and pupils.
- The growing confidence, resilience and achievements of the young people in the unit.
- The steps which senior managers are currently taking to track and monitor young people's progress.

3. Example of good practice

- The expressive arts project 'Artlink Central' which allows young people opportunities to engage in high quality art and media work.

4. How well do children learn and achieve?

Learning and achievement

Young people in the unit enjoy a varied range of learning experiences which has improved their motivation to achieve. Staff engage very positively with young people within a calm, relaxed and purposeful learning environment. Young people feel safe and secure and are treated with equality, dignity and respect. They feel that the unit is helping them to develop their learning and their confidence. Young people and their parents identify strongly with the unit and families are

proud of what their children have achieved. Pupils engage particularly well with outdoor education and expressive arts. Young people are developing their skills in creativity, citizenship and awareness of life in the rest of the world. They are doing this through enterprise activities and fundraising for charities at local, national and international levels. Young people work across different subject areas during these projects. Almost all young people have learned how to play a musical instrument. Pupils are more active in these types of activities than in much of their classroom work.

Staff in the unit have helped young people to improve their attendance. In August 2008 almost all young people leaving the unit gained qualifications in mathematics and English at Access 3 or in Standard Grade at General and Foundation levels. A few young people gained Access 3 awards in history. Careful tracking of pupils' behaviour through a behaviour reward scheme shows that the behaviour of almost all pupils has improved. Staff in the unit focus strongly on helping young people to resolve difficulties in a positive way.

Young people are not yet able to gain awards for their achievements in a full range of subject areas or for their wider achievements. The unit should now consider other subjects which could be accredited for young people. They should also look closely at accrediting other forms of achievement through, for example, The Duke of Edinburgh's Award or John Muir awards. Last year all young people gained employment or college placements on leaving the unit. Exclusion rates have significantly reduced.

Curriculum and meeting learning needs

Due to the recent changes to the unit's role and purpose significant aspects of the curriculum need to improve. The timetable is not always planned in a way which makes full use of teaching time, with too much time being spent on social activities. At the moment the core curriculum is narrow and tends to focus too much on staff interests, with college placements used to supplement the programmes young people are following. Almost all young people attend part-time

placements at a local college where they are involved in taster courses. In some cases this has led to future enrolment in a relevant course of study. Additional experiences in physical education, home economics and expressive arts also support the curriculum. The unit places a strong emphasis on physical activity and all young people have more than two hours physical education in the week. Other physical activities include horse-riding, football, badminton and basketball. Young people are learning to cooperate with each other and work in teams through such activities. The unit needs to review learning experiences for girls to ensure they always have appropriate choices. A group of young people are working towards gaining youth achievement awards. A few pupils enjoy extended work placements related to their individual areas of interest.

Through the personal, social and health education programme, teachers tackle a full range of issues which help to prepare young people for leaving the unit. They help young people to cope with difficulties by looking for very positive solutions to the challenges they may face. A religious and moral education programme covers equality and diversity topics. There are currently no opportunities for religious observance. The unit needs to develop a broader curriculum which ensures that pupils have appropriate choices and are able to build on what they have already achieved. Young people do not always benefit from effective use of information and communications technology across the curriculum. When young people transfer from the unit to post-school placements staff manage this carefully and pupils are well supported. When young people arrive from other schools and units staff do not always receive enough information to support them effectively.

Staff are skilled at creating a calm and purposeful learning environment which keeps almost all young people interested. Almost all young people have started learning again due to the support they receive. In the classes, work is planned for each young person individually and is geared towards gaining qualifications. A few pupils would benefit from working on more difficult tasks and at a faster pace. Staff know the young people they are working with very well and

respond very quickly to their changing needs. Staff take positive steps to encourage pupils' attendance and emotional wellbeing. Teachers work individually with them and organise relevant work programmes in each subject area. They need to create more opportunities for them to work together during lessons. Specialist staff provide very good support to young people in the unit. For example, the youth worker provides individual programmes in parenting, sexual health and community projects. External artists involve young people in expressive arts projects. These projects are effectively designed to meet their personal and social needs as well as developing their creativity. Young people are also involved with an external agency which works successfully with groups of pupils on resolving conflict.

Young people receive good support in their college placements. Lecturers are very positive about the progress young people are making in their independence, social skills and coursework. All pupils have individualised educational programmes which target a range of learning and behavioural needs. The unit has correctly identified that these plans need to be improved in order to meet the needs of all pupils more effectively. At the time of inspection no young person had a coordinated support plan. The unit and authority should continue to review the extent to which individual young people might benefit from this level of coordination.

5. How well do staff work with others to support children's learning?

The unit works very effectively with parents and all staff have developed very good relationships with families. All parents and carers are very positive about the unit and how it has helped their children to grow in confidence and develop more positive attitudes to learning. Many parents feel that their children's future prospects for further education or employment have improved as a result of the unit's approaches. Parents enjoy hearing about their children's progress at regular reviews. The unit has an 'open door' policy for parents and almost all parents or carers meet with staff on a regular

basis. Parents feel comfortable in discussing sensitive issues with staff and have confidence in the staff's ability to work with their children. The unit is well placed to continue to include parents more fully in their children's learning.

The unit has developed very strong relationships with a range of partners, including local secondary schools, colleges and businesses. A few pupils attend mainstream secondary schools part-time. Staff manage these links effectively and young people are included well in their community schools. Staff in the unit work actively with other agencies which can support young people, for example, substance misuse organisations, careers advisors, mental health workers and army personnel. Community wardens are also actively involved with the unit. They provide a positive link between the unit and the local community and reported that young people in the unit contribute positively to the local area. Young people benefit regularly from the sensitive and confidential advice given by the community nurse.

6. Are staff and children actively involved in improving their school community?

All staff are enthusiastic about the life and work of the school. Staff reflect informally on the work of the unit but are not systematically involved in evaluating and improving the service it provides. Staff feel they receive strong support from managers and that managers communicate well about the work of the unit. Senior managers have started to track improvements and progress of young people's learning and behaviour more effectively over a three year cycle. They now need to evaluate the quality of teaching and learning to ensure that learners' experiences are of a consistently high quality. Senior managers also need to plan more effectively for identifying areas where the unit should improve. The unit needs to consider how to enable all staff, young people, parents and partner agencies to have a say in improving the quality of education. Young people feel their views are listened to on a day-to-day basis. They are keen to take this further and form a pupil council so that young people can share their

views more formally, take on roles of responsibility and make suggestions for change and improvements. Over the past three years, young people's attainment has increased because of the attention paid to their emotional wellbeing and the encouragement they receive to attend and achieve as well as they can.

7. Does the school have high expectations of all children?

Staff in the unit show a high level of understanding of young people. They work well as a team to support young people in a caring environment. The unit has very attractive displays of young people's achievements. The management team has raised young people's expectations, leading to improved attendance. Almost all staff have suitably high expectations for young people although a few pupils are not being fully challenged in all subjects. A few young people were not attaining at levels which took full account of previous achievements. Staff need to be more confident in teaching higher level courses. Staff have a very good knowledge of procedures for child protection and how to manage behaviour. Standards of behaviour were high during the inspection. Pupils could be more fully involved in assessing their behaviour and setting future goals for themselves.

8. Does the school have a clear sense of direction?

Senior managers are enthusiastic about the future direction of the unit. The unit now has a clear sense of purpose and staff have a strong sense of confidence in the senior management team. The positive developments over the last three years have provided a solid foundation on which to base the unit's new and changing role. Both the unit and authority will need to manage these developments carefully. Managers and staff are now well placed to think again about their vision, values and aims.

Teaching staff need to be more fully involved in shaping future improvements, assessing how their teaching could improve and taking lead roles in developing the curriculum.

9. What happens next?

We are confident that with ongoing direction and support from the authority, the school will be able to make the necessary improvements in light of the inspection findings. As a result, we will make no more visits following this inspection. The school and the education authority have agreed to amend the school improvement plan to take account of what we found during the inspection. They will inform parents about the school's progress in improving the quality of education.

We have agreed the following areas for improvement with the school and education authority.

- Improve the curriculum for all young people.
- Ensure young people are learning actively and are encouraged to work with other learners.
- Improve planning for individual pupils and involve them in setting their own learning and behaviour targets.
- Provide a clear vision and direction for improving the unit and involve all staff in taking it forward.
- Extend the length of the school week and revise timetables in order to increase the amount of time spent on learning.

Quality indicators help schools and nursery classes, education authorities and inspectors to judge what is good and what needs to be improved in the work of a school and a nursery class. You can find these quality indicators in the HMIE publications *How good is our school?* and *The Child at the Centre*. Following the inspection of each school, the Scottish Government gathers evaluations of three important quality indicators to keep track of how well all Scottish schools and nursery classes are doing.

Here are the evaluations for Falkirk Day Unit.

Improvements in performance	satisfactory
Learners' experiences	good
Meeting learning needs	good

We also evaluated the following aspects of the work of the school.

The curriculum	weak
Improvement through self-evaluation	weak

HM Inspector: Angela Edwards
20 January 2009

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This report uses the following word scale to make clear judgements made by inspectors.

excellent	outstanding, sector leading
very good	major strengths
good	important strengths with some areas for improvement
satisfactory	strengths just outweigh weaknesses
weak	important weaknesses
unsatisfactory	major weaknesses