

Sherborne Learning Centre

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	130315
Local Authority	Dorset
Inspection number	360126
Inspection dates	30 September 2010–1 October 2010
Reporting inspector	Mick Megee

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 of pupils on the school roll	34
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Nicki Edwards
Headteacher	Ian Hedley
Date of previous school inspection	5 September 2007
School address	Simon's Road Sherborne DT9 4DN
Telephone number	01935 814582
Fax number	01935 814582
Email address	i.hedley@dorsetcc.gov.uk

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

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one additional inspector. Six teachers were seen and six lessons were observed. The inspector attended a midday meal shared by students and staff. Meetings were held with a group of students, the chair of the management committee and staff. Two parents were interviewed by telephone. The inspector observed the centre's work, and looked at a wide range of written information including data files, curriculum planning and School Improvement Partner records. In addition, a sample of students' work was scrutinised and 12 staff questionnaires, 4 parental questionnaires and 10 student questionnaires were received and analysed.

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

- How well different groups of students achieve in lessons and attend the centre.
- How effectively teachers use assessment information to match activities to the varying capabilities and needs of learners.
- The quality of the support given to students so that they return quickly and successfully to mainstream schools. The quality of the support given to students so that they return quickly and successfully to mainstream schools.

Information about the school

Students who attend the Sherborne Learning Centre come from a large geographical area covering the market towns of Sherborne, Gillingham, Sturminster Newton and Shaftesbury in Dorset. Students who attend the centre have a wide variety of difficulties and disabilities. The largest group have social, emotional or behavioural difficulties and have been permanently excluded, or are in danger of being excluded, from mainstream schools. A small number have psychological, mental or physical health difficulties. A few students have a statement of special educational needs, although the number varies over the year. About a third of the students are registered both at the centre and in their school, to prevent them being permanently excluded. The centre achieved Healthy School status in 2007 and Rights Respecting Schools status in 2010. Since the last inspection, the centre has appointed a deputy headteacher. The centre now has its own management committee to replace the previous area-wide management committee. Very few pupils in Key Stages 1 or 2 attend the centre, although support is provided at the school, there were none on roll at the time of the inspection.

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?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Sherborne Learning Centre is an effective pupil referral unit that has continued to improve in all outcomes, including the quality of students' behaviour, the rates of attendance and successful re-integration of students back into mainstream schools. Teaching is of increasingly good quality and brings about good academic and personal achievement. The staffing and leadership structure is stable, and the headteacher and new deputy headteacher share responsibility well for the work of the centre. There is thorough and accurate self-evaluation, supported by improved assessment information. The new management committee carries out its responsibilities effectively and responds well to the specific needs of the centre. All these factors support the centre's good capacity for improvement. There is excellent care, guidance and support, including safeguarding, for the students. Staff are consistently alert to the needs of students, and the centre has formed excellent partnerships with other schools and agencies to provide consistent and welcome educational, medical and mental health support. The centre has extremely good relationships with its parents and carers who greatly value the positive changes that the centre has brought about in the lives of their children and in the families. A typical comment was, 'The centre was a godsend. It's a huge relief to find such a wonderful team that deal so sensitively with my daughter's condition. A huge thank you!'

Students arrive at the centre often with a chequered educational past, and a poor experience of learning. The overwhelming majority overcome their quite significant difficulties and successfully re-engage with their learning, supported by the staff's welcoming, sympathetic and skilful approach. Students become focused and self-disciplined in lessons, and are given a second chance to study a wide and interesting range of subjects. However, the centre finds it difficult to offer some practical aspects of the work in science because of the lack of space and resources. Although there are good opportunities for students to undertake outdoor education, there is a shortage of opportunities for students to have frequent, regular, intensive physical exercise and the centre recognises that there is scope for further improvement in this respect. Most teachers are beginning to use the more accurate assessment information effectively to cater for individual circumstances. Some teachers are less skilful at this, particularly in science, and so there are lessons where activities are insufficiently challenging, particularly for more able students. Nevertheless, students achieve a good level in their core subjects, and those in Year 11 attain good results so that they go on to productive academic or vocational courses.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning so that all lessons are at least good or better by July 2011 by:

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Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

- ensuring that teachers make full use of assessment information when planning lessons
- ensuring that activities are always well paced and well matched to the needs and capabilities of all the students
- raising expectations of the levels students can reach, particularly in science.
- Improve the quality of the curriculum by providing increased structured opportunities for all students:
 - to undertake frequent and regular intensive physical exercise
 - to undertake learning at first hand in the practical elements of science.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**2**

Progress is good overall for all groups of students in English and mathematics, and it is satisfactory in science, where the teaching is less skilful. Students arrive at the centre with attainment that is low in comparison with national averages, because of significant gaps in their learning, and often poor self-esteem. Once at the centre, students begin to make positive strides forward, and regain their confidence and enthusiasm. Students' enjoyment of learning was evident in the lessons seen during the inspection and in their discussions with the inspector. There are very positive relationships within the classroom and staff constantly give encouragement and realistic feedback. In one art lesson, students watched slides of abstract paintings, listened well to the teacher's informative commentary and engaged in a very fruitful discussion about their own coursework, taking good account of the staff's guidance. Students behave well in lessons, work hard and want to do well. There is slower progress in a few lessons where teachers set undemanding activities or the pace is slow. Where this happens, students show maturity and do not express their irritation or react badly. Students who have additional difficulties such as health problems, and those who have a statement of special educational needs, receive gentle and sensitive support in lessons so that they make the same overall good progress as others. Students in Key Stage 4 achieve well in the accredited programmes, such as GCSE and BTEC which they undertake. Attendance is satisfactory and there is often a huge improvement when compared with attendance at their previous schools, sometimes increasing from zero to 100 per cent. Students get on well with each other, there is frequent banter and they rarely show unkindness. There is very little bullying and in this friendly and kind environment students, with few exceptions, feel safe. Students have a good understanding of how to live healthily, but many of them continue to smoke, despite the centre's zero tolerance policy. In addition, there are limited structured opportunities for physical exercise. Students make a good contribution to the centre and local community, for example by visiting local primary schools to help with 'Imagineering' fairs and undertaking community projects such as film-making about the lives of travellers.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
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	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

How effective is the provision?

issues being shown at a national film festival. The extensive outdoor education programme includes opportunities for fishing, equestrian activities and 'geocaching' ? treasure hunting using electronic trackers. In science, staff look for ways to overcome shortcomings in the availability of laboratory facilities and have introduced courses to get round difficulties. The curriculum, while good, does not offer sufficient opportunities for students to undertake regular, intensive physical exercise such as by visiting local sports centres or gyms.

The centre gives the highest priority to caring, guiding and supporting all its students. This is evident in the very effective use made of outside agencies such as the education welfare service, Connexions, mental health specialists and drugs and alcohol adviser. Behaviour management is consistent, calm and very effective. Pastoral guidance is very strong within the centre. The centre operates a tutor system so that students know they always have someone to turn to, no matter what the difficulty. All students have a personalised support plan and a family outreach worker is always available to ensure swift communication and support is given to families when it is required. The very strong partnership with the local secondary schools means that there is a seamless array of support for individuals, especially for re-integration and prevention of exclusion.

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These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
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	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher has driven forward improvements well since the last inspection and, through his quiet authority, is absolutely committed to providing the best opportunities for students. With the appointment of a deputy headteacher, the headteacher is able to develop further his strategic role, especially through the centre's already very effective partnerships, and is determined to spread ambition and leadership more widely through all the staff. The new senior leadership team is already involved well in centre self-evaluation and improvement. There is regular monitoring of provision, through lesson observations, scrutiny of work and lesson plans, which enable the team to identify where improvements are most required. There is a good system in place for tracking students' progress, although the full potential of tracking and assessment information in improving teaching has not yet been realised by all staff.

The new management committee has specific responsibility for monitoring and challenging the Sherborne Learning Centre. Its members are very experienced and, although new, they have hit the ground running and are already making positive decisions in order to benefit the students. The centre, through its effective equality action plan, is actively reducing discrimination and providing equal opportunities for all students, including the most vulnerable. The centre gives a very high priority to all matters of safeguarding, including risk assessments and the safe recruitment of staff. The centre fully meets all government requirements.

Parental questionnaires and discussion with parents reveal a very high level of satisfaction. The low return rate for the questionnaire reflects low literacy levels in some families, and the long distances between home and school making postal communication erratic. The centre gives a lot of good support to families, especially through the very effective family outreach worker. This support has improved the coordination of services so that students' needs are effectively met, leading to improved attendance and well-being, such as finding housing for a potentially homeless student. The centre promotes community cohesion well, and there are some good outcomes at the local level. An example of this is the centre's successful bid to provide a cookery 'hub' for the town, which the local primary school will use for after-school clubs. Outcomes are less well developed at the international level and this forms part of the centre's action plan.

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These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
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	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Views of parents and carers

All four responses to the parents' questionnaire were entirely positive and all contained additional comments endorsing the work of the centre. In addition, the inspector spoke to two parents by telephone. Their views fully support the outcomes, quality of provision, and leadership and management described in this report. There were no negative comments. This comment from one parent summarises the views expressed, 'The headteacher and staff at the centre know how to reason with and talk 'to' rather than 'at' the students when there is an issue. They are kind, caring and helpful.'

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Sherborne Learning Centre to complete a questionnaire about their views of the centre. In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the centre. The inspector received four completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 34 students registered at the centre.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	3	75	1	25	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	2	50	2	50	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	3	75	1	25	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	2	50	2	50	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	2	50	2	50	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	3	75	1	25	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	2	50	2	50	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)	3	75	1	25	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	3	75	1	25	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	3	75	1	25	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	4	100	0	0	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	3	75	1	25	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	3	75	1	25	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 all 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	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

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 are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 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 pupils' 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.



4 October 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Sherborne Learning Centre, Sherborne DT9 4DN

I am writing to let you know the outcome of the inspection of the Sherborne Learning Centre. I enjoyed my visit very much. Thank you very much for meeting with me and telling me all the good things you do. I agree with you that the centre gives you all a good education and the staff give you much that will help you in the future.

Once you are at the centre, you clearly gain confidence in what you do and it was good to see you all putting a lot of effort in. You are all becoming mature students and making good progress in your studies.

The headteacher and staff give you strong support so that you can get back on track and get the best out of your education. They provide you with many interesting and valuable opportunities to learn, and the teachers are good at seeing that you have what you need to make progress. Talking to you and reading the questionnaires you filled in, I can see that you really appreciate what the staff are doing for you.

There are a few things that still need to be done. Your centre could improve by making sure that:

- there is a fast pace in lessons, activities that match what you need and high expectations from all the teachers
- all of you have frequent opportunities to take exercise so that you keep fit and stay healthy, and that you have more opportunities to do hands-on work in science.

Perhaps those of you who smoke could help by cutting down or giving up smoking and all of you could help by making sure you get lots of good exercise!

Best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Mick Megee Lead Inspector

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