

Sycamore Secondary Short Stay School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	134768
Local Authority	Dudley
Inspection number	381737
Inspection dates	17–18 October 2011
Reporting inspector	Alan Lemon

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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	82
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Chair	N/A
Headteacher	Bene Willis
Date of previous school inspection	14 January 2009
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. Across the three sites, 13 lessons were observed involving 11 teachers. Meetings were held with groups of students, staff and representatives of the management committee and local authority. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at a range of documentation including policies and procedures for safeguarding students and data showing their performance, including academic outcomes, attendance and behaviour. Thirteen questionnaires returned by students' parents and carers were scrutinised.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- Is there convincing evidence of good progress in terms of academic achievement, behaviour and attendance?
- Are staff managing students' behaviour effectively?
- Have leaders driven improvement to the extent of positive results in the provision for students and their outcomes?

Information about the school

The Sycamore Short Stay Secondary School (the Short Stay School) was formed in September 2010 bringing together the Sycamore Key Stage 3 pupil referral unit, the Abberley Street Key Stage 4 pupil referral unit and, latterly, the Pensnett Education Campus. Altogether, these occupy three sites in or near Dudley. The Pensnett Education Campus provides for Key Stage 4 students from Pensnett High School which was closed in 2010. It offers a range of GCSE and vocational courses for Year 11 students and has 55 on roll. The Pensnett Education Campus was joined to the Sycamore Short Stay School and its management committee. Its leaders and managers are independent of the other centres and it will close in 2012 when its students leave.

The Short Stay School provides education for permanently excluded students and those at risk of exclusion. There are 27 students on roll of whom 21 are at Key Stage 3. All of these students have behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, although none has a statement of special educational needs. Three are looked after by their local authority and the proportion known to be eligible for free school meals is above average.

The Short Stay School provides partnership work with mainstream secondary schools to reduce exclusions, support the reintegration of students and parenting support. It has the Arts Mark and National Healthy School status.

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 effectiveness of the Short Stay School and Pensnett Education Campus is satisfactory. The leadership and management of the Short Stay School are satisfactory in that high expectations are embedded and improvements are impacting upon provision and students' outcomes. Senior leaders drive improvement resolutely and have a clearly articulated mission on which to base the direction of their developments. The management committee provides good support to the Short Stay School's development, aided by the commitment and positive contributions of the local authority. However, while some barriers hindering improvement have been overcome, others have slowed the rate of development. A significant achievement of leaders has been bringing together the staff at the Sycamore Centre and Abberley Street into a cohesive team sharing a common purpose. Moreover, the leadership of both provisions now come under a single direction and this is strengthening the school. There are staff appointments still to be made and absences necessitating the use of a significant number of temporary staff. This is hindering improvement to some extent in relation to the quality of teaching and the implementation of an ambitious curriculum. Nevertheless, students' progress is quickening and the school's capacity to sustain improvement is satisfactory.

Leaders' evaluation of strengths and weaknesses is rigorous and accurate, providing in particular a good estimation of what needs improving in lessons. Sharing the good practice of a number of teachers is seen by leaders as a key to the further development of the satisfactory teaching in the Short Stay School. Consistency in the use of assessment to track students' progress, plan lessons and set targets is lacking in some lessons. Furthermore, expectations are not always high enough. Students' achievement, progress and enjoyment of school are satisfactory.

Satisfactory leadership of Pensnett Educational Campus is maintaining a breadth of Key Stage 4 provision and improving students' outcomes. Having increased the rigour with which students' progress is tracked and the findings used, leaders are raising attainment although it remains well below average. However, the sharper focus on each student's performance and the early interventions to support them are leading to improvement in their progress, which is satisfactory. Teaching is satisfactory although students tend to be passive in lessons, are not always actively engaged and are at times reluctant to use their initiative to increase their knowledge, skills and understanding.

Care, guidance and support are good in the Short Stay School and Pensnett

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Education Campus. The arrangements for safeguarding students are good. Good practices for keeping students safe have been implemented and staff are well trained in this respect. Good partnerships with mainstream schools, colleges, a range of vocational education providers and work with the various agencies ensure students and their families are offered effective guidance and support.

Up to 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.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning in the Short Stay School by:
 - raising expectations by using assessment information consistently to keep a close track of students' progress
 - planning lessons with clear and relevant objectives
 - setting targets that build systematically on students' prior learning.

- Improve teaching and learning in Pensnett Education Campus by:
 - planning lessons with approaches to teaching which are effective in engaging students actively in learning
 - teaching students to use their initiative to learn and providing effective opportunities for them to take greater charge of developing their knowledge, skills and understanding.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**3**

Many students in the Short Stay School are not well motivated learners because of disrupted educational experiences in previous settings and their behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. Their attainment on entry is low and remains so, although the quality of students' learning and their progress is satisfactory. Improvements in teaching and the curriculum are well aimed at tackling this, and are having the effect of quickening progress. Students' behaviour in lessons is satisfactory. They respond to teachers' expectations and are mostly cooperative. As a result, they settle in lessons, pay attention and contribute both by completing set tasks, answering questions thoughtfully and joining discussions. There are no significant variations in the performance of different groups of students. Overall, students invest sufficient effort to achieve satisfactorily, although where teaching is good they clearly enjoy learning and find it rewarding. In one English lesson, the teacher promoted lively debate on students staying safe. This led students into an intense discussion in which they used their own experiences constructively to explore moral and social issues.

In Pensnett Education Campus, students maintain a steady effort with their work. They are much more lively and engaged in practical lessons such as engineering or food technology, where outcomes are good. In other lessons, the lack of stimulus in

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teaching means students, while contributing reasonably well, are not sufficiently active and independent in their learning.

Students in the Short Stay School respond positively to the opportunities to contribute in school and in the wider community. They help to maintain the garden in the play park adjoining one of the school sites. Attendance is broadly average and for many students improves as they settle into daily routines and begin to enjoy learning.

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	4
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	3
Pupils’ behaviour	3
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	3
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	3
The extent of pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

How effective is the provision?

In both the Short Stay School and Pensnett Education Campus, lessons are a mix of good, lively, engaging teaching and teaching using approaches that do not stimulate students’ real enjoyment of learning or result in good progress. Students enjoyed making a product, in design and technology, food technology and art and so their learning and progress were good. However, these lessons were also well planned, had high expectations, gave students clear objectives to achieve and used a variety of resources creatively to promote learning. At Pensnett Education Campus, in food technology, a video excerpt demonstrating the artful presentation of food inspired students to create dainty, appealing displays, reaching a high standard. Not all lessons are as well planned, either because they are not based on a good assessment of students’ abilities or teaching fails to promote enough enthusiasm for learning. Here, the challenge for students is moderate. Occasionally, too much time is spent on teachers talking and students listening passively or learning resources

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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and ways of presenting them are not well adapted to capture students’ interest and engagement at a high enough level.

The Short Stay School’s curriculum is being re-modelled so that it becomes well adapted to students’ needs and interests. Behavioural, emotional and social development is at the core of work and activities, and is planned as a common thread running through the curriculum. It aims to improve behaviour and attitudes to learning and has a positive impact, particularly on behaviour. The curriculum is enriched with a good variety of activities which encourage students’ engagement with school. Outdoor education offers organised water sports and climbing. English and mathematics are planned to promote students’ functional skills and strategies are being put in place to develop their reading. When appropriate, students are offered work experience with local businesses and work-related learning incorporating, for example, construction and motor vehicle maintenance.

Good relationships between students and staff at the Short Stay School and Pensnett Education Campus contribute to encouraging appropriate behaviour and cooperation. At the Short Stay School, staff manage behaviour skilfully and with sensitivity with the result that they defuse conflicts quickly and maintain a calm, purposeful atmosphere. The policies for safeguarding students are well embedded and good links with outside agencies promote students’ welfare. At both schools, students have their tutors or keyworkers and the support offered to them is well organised and much appreciated. Students are strongly encouraged to attend school regularly and the reward system operating in the Short Stay School adds further positive impact to reducing absences. Transition arrangements have high priority and are effective. The arrangements for moving on to college, planning future employment and preparing for independence are firmly in place.

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	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Senior leaders have established the Short Stay School as a coherent and increasingly cohesive organisation. Ambition, informed by clear aims and direction, has ensured any difficulties encountered on the way, such as with staffing, have not significantly hindered improvements. Members of the management committee are well qualified and experienced for their roles. They have supported leaders effectively and are ensuring, alongside the local authority, that provision meets local needs and those of students and their parents and carers. Together with senior leaders, the committee

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ensures that the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination. Their observations of the school’s work have meant they have been able to challenge effectively on several matters; on improving teaching in particular. Leaders are refining how students’ progress is measured, tracked and analysed. While this is at an early stage of development, a range of data is collected evidencing students’ positive outcomes. Tracking of progress and the use of data to monitor students’ performance is embedded at Pensnett Education Campus where it is used with increasing effect to plan, where necessary, support for students to ensure they achieve their targets.

The Short Stay School is developing its strategies to increase engagement with parents and carers. The role of the parent support worker has been created in order to reach out more effectively to parents and carers. Good partnerships with other schools have developed as a result of the support offered to them in managing behaviour, students at risk of exclusion and those returning to mainstream education. The policies and procedures for safeguarding students are implemented effectively. Staff are trained in being aware and in responding to concerns. The induction of temporary staff includes training on safeguarding procedures. The promotion of community cohesion has not been a major focus for leaders. The Short Stay School is a cohesive community and in several ways it reaches out positively to the wider community through students raising money for good causes, helping to maintain the garden of the public play area next door and taking part in activities with a group for older people.

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	3
The effectiveness of the management committee 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	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Views of parents and carers

The response to the questionnaire was below average. Thirteen parents and carers

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of students attending Pensnett Education Campus submitted completed questionnaires. No parents and carers of students attending the Short Stay School returned questionnaires. Scrutiny of the questionnaires reveals positive views of Pensnett Education Campus. All the parents and carers who responded are happy with their child's experience at this school. They all agree that their children are kept safe and are well prepared for the future. They all believe the school to be well led and managed. Inspection findings show overall that students enjoy school, make satisfactory progress and are prepared satisfactorily for the future.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of students registered at Sycamore Secondary Short Stay School 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 13 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 82 students registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	3	23	9	69	1	8	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	6	46	7	54	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	4	31	9	69	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	5	38	7	54	1	8	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	6	46	7	54	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	2	15	10	77	1	8	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	3	23	8	62	2	15	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)	7	54	6	46	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child’s particular needs	6	46	7	54	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	6	46	7	54	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	4	31	8	62	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	4	31	9	69	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	7	54	6	46	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	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

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 2010 to 08 April 2011 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 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.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

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.



19 October 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Sycamore Secondary Short Stay School, Dudley, DY1 3QE

Many thanks for your warm welcome when I visited the Sycamore Secondary Short Stay School. Thanks also to the groups of students who met with inspectors to share their views. The Short Stay School and Pensnett Education Campus provide you with a satisfactory education and both have some good features.

- The quality of care, guidance and support you are given by staff is good.
- The arrangements for keeping you safe are good.
- There are good partnerships in the community, with other schools, businesses and many support agencies that help smooth your way back into mainstream education or prepare for future employment.
- Teaching is satisfactory but there is some room for improvement.
- You are making satisfactory progress in lessons and in your preparation for either returning to school or moving on to college.

I have asked school leaders to do the following in order to help your schools to improve further:

- to improve teaching in the Short Stay School by better use of assessment to keep close track of your progress, to plan lessons with clear learning objectives, and set targets for you to achieve that build on what you have already learnt and provide you with challenging work
- in Pensnett Education Campus, improve teaching and learning by adopting approaches in lessons that encourage you to be more active learners and teach you to use your initiative effectively to learn and make progress.

You can help your school by continuing to improve your attendance and behaviour. I wish you all the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Alan Lemon
Lead inspector

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