

Dorchester Learning Centre

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	130316
Local Authority	Dorset
Inspection number	381259
Inspection dates	2–3 November 2011
Reporting inspector	Denise Morris

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	64
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Headteacher	John Taylor
Date of previous school inspection	5 February 2009
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. They observed teaching and learning in 11 lessons taught by 11 different teachers. Meetings were held with the headteacher, a member of the management committee, students, teachers and other leaders and managers. Inspectors observed the work at four different sites, and looked at safeguarding and planning documents, assessment information and students' work. Inspectors analysed eight questionnaires from parents and carers. Responses from staff and students were also analysed.

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

- Whether the procedures for assessing and tracking students' achievements have improved since the previous inspection and whether students are fully involved in setting their own targets.
- How leaders have maximised opportunities for accreditation and vocational work experience.
- Attendance levels at the four different sites.

Information about the school

The Dorchester Learning Centre has a main teaching base close to Dorchester and uses three other sites elsewhere in the county to teach small groups of students. These include a small site in Bridport known as The Mill, a classroom at the local hospital, and a site in Portland that caters for outdoor pursuits such as power boating. The majority of students who attend the centre are still on the roll of mainstream schools and are dual registered. The centre also caters for students who have been permanently excluded from a mainstream school, students with medical conditions that prevent attendance at mainstream schools and a few students without access to regular education, such as those belonging to Traveller families. Permanently excluded students are offered full-time programmes; other students attend the centre for differing periods of time. The dual-registered students' length of stay varies, but for many is no longer than two terms. A few students are admitted with a statement of special educational needs and a few are in the care of the local authority. Occasionally, a primary pupil is admitted for a short period while a permanent placement is secured.

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

This is a good learning centre which has maintained its good outcomes since the last inspection. Parents and carers are right when they say their children are safe and secure. This is because of good safeguarding procedures and good care, guidance and support. 'The school has made a huge difference in not only my son's education but his confidence also,' was a typical written comment. Students achieve well. They make good progress from their individual starting points so that by the time most leave the centre to go back to a mainstream school, or to college, a large majority have improved their behaviour, attendance and skills. Those who stay until Year 11 attain GCSEs and/or vocational qualifications and have the opportunity to take some accredited vocational courses such as building and construction. However, there is too narrow a range of courses specifically tailored to the interests and needs of girls who say that they would like more choice, particularly in areas that would provide suitable preparation for employment. Girls and boys and all the different groups of students, including those with medical conditions, those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those from Traveller backgrounds, achieve equally well.

The quality of teaching and learning is good at all of the sites, with some outstanding provision for art leading to excellent achievement in this area. In a few subjects, particularly science, resources are limited so that some aspects cannot be taught. Resources for information and communication technology (ICT) are also limited. Students' attitudes and behaviour are good and they value the support that they receive. Their personal development improves rapidly once they start at the centre and they quickly realise that staff are there to help them and that there is always someone who will listen to them. They know how to stay safe and their awareness of healthy eating is generally good. Students have many opportunities throughout the week to keep fit, although they do not always have opportunities to take on responsibilities at the centre or in the community. Their moral development is particularly good but their awareness of the different cultures that make up the United Kingdom is more limited. Parents' and carers' views of the centre are positive, though only a very few responded to the inspection questionnaires.

The headteacher has a clear vision and high expectations of students and staff. He is very ably supported by the deputy headteacher. They have embedded their ambition for the centre through accurate self-evaluation and by driving improvement successfully since the last inspection, particularly in the assessment and tracking of students' achievements. As a result students are now fully involved in setting and measuring their own targets. A strong emphasis on getting students to attend is

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working and attendance is now broadly average. Strong partnerships and the effective contribution of support services ensure that students' needs are well met. Overall, the centre has good capacity for further improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Extend the curriculum by:
 - providing a wider range of courses for girls
 - increasing the range of resources for science and ICT
 - creating opportunities for students to make decisions and take on simple responsibilities.

- Improve students' awareness of the different cultures that make up the United Kingdom.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

When students join the centre their attainment is often low but they quickly catch up and make good progress during their time there. The attainment of those who remain until the end of Year 11 is broadly average. Students, including those with additional special educational needs and/or disabilities, make good progress and some make excellent progress. The pace of students' learning increases when activities are fully matched to their individual needs and interests. This was particularly evident at the Number 51 site where Year 11 students were working towards their art GCSE. Excellent teaching and exciting resources that fully engaged and challenged them resulted in some excellent achievement in understanding the work of different artists. Similarly in an English lesson, where a student learning about the relationships between the characters in Romeo and Juliet quickly grasped the fact that relationships then were much the same as they are today. Almost all students start to show enthusiasm from the beginning of their time at the centre and many stay on task for long periods. Most work hard to achieve their goals and have high aspirations for their futures.

Most students recognise the importance of eating healthily. They know that fruit and exercise are good for them, for example, but not quite all make healthy choices. They also understand the dangers of smoking. There are good examples of students' engagement in exercise, with some exciting activities such as power boating where several attain the Royal Yachting Association qualifications. Boys and girls also enjoy the go-karting sessions and a team from the school recently reached the British finals in their class. A few students contribute appropriately to the school and community: some help out at a cafe in the town while others help at a nursery. They raise some money for charities but on the whole their role is passive and there is no student council to drive decision making. Given the improvements in their behaviour, their successes in sport and academic qualifications and their improving attendance, the

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majority are prepared appropriately for the future.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment	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	1
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
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	2

How effective is the provision?

Teachers have mainly positive relationships with their students. Disruptions in learning are very rare and any difficulties are well managed. Classes are small so that each student receives high levels of attention. Expectations are high and students respect this. Support assistants and resources are used well in lessons but deficiencies in resources for aspects of science, particularly chemistry, and for ICT can limit learning in these subjects.

The good curriculum has some exciting opportunities for students. A rigorous programme consisting of basic skills in English, mathematics and science as well as a wide range of accreditation is available to all students. Key strengths of the centre are the quality of extra-curricular activities and the wide range of accredited courses. There is a good range of sports activities, including team sports, which help to keep students fit and healthy. Food technology focuses on healthy ingredients and students are encouraged to cook for others. Most parents and carers are pleased with the package offered to their children but a small minority feel that the curriculum content is not academic enough and is based more on leisure than education. Inspection evidence shows that there is a good balance of leisure and academic activities. Students are pleased with the education offered. They value the leisure activities but are fully aware that these are only available if they complete their studies.

Many of the students at the centre are vulnerable because of the nature of their difficulties; procedures to track vulnerable students are rigorous. Staff work closely with a wide range of professionals to support students and try to prevent them from

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drifting into trouble and out of the education system. The strong pastoral system ensures that every student has a key worker who links with parents and carers and external agencies. ‘Key workers understand us – they are nice,’ commented a student. Although overall attendance is average, there are some very good examples of significantly increased attendance by students once they start at the centre, helped by improved tracking systems. Transition in and out of the centre is well managed.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
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?

Leaders are driving improvement in all areas and are ably supported by the whole staff team. Accurate self-evaluation has ensured that leaders know what is working well and what needs improving. Staff training is thorough and monitoring is rigorous. All of the staff who responded to the inspection questionnaires said that they are proud to work at the centre.

Leaders carefully eliminate discrimination and promote equality by ensuring that opportunities are open to all and by rigorously tracking outcomes for all groups. The management committee is knowledgeable and supportive and regularly challenges leaders about decisions. The centre’s strategy for community cohesion is developing appropriately. A link with a school in the Sudan has been established but it is not yet having an impact on students’ cultural understanding. Partnerships, particularly those with support agencies, local schools and colleges are good, and have resulted in productive experiences for students and contribute effectively to their well-being. Successful reintegration programmes are working well. Regular and robust links with parents and carers contribute well to students’ improving attendance. Safeguarding procedures, including those for child protection, fully meet current government guidelines and are rigorously monitored across all the sites.

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	2

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school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	
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	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Views of parents and carers

Very few parents and carers responded to the inspection questionnaires. Those who did respond said that their children enjoy being at the centre, that the centre keeps them safe and that it prepares their children well for the future. A very small minority of parents and carers did not think that the centre manages behaviour well. One parent, however, commented that 'the centre will not accept any bullying, staff have respect for students which results in students also respecting staff.' Inspectors found behaviour at the centre to be good both in lessons and around the outdoor area.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Dorchester Learning 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 eight completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 64 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	5	63	2	25	1	13	0	
The school keeps my child safe	6	75	2	25	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	5	63	3	38	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	5	63	2	25	1	13	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	7	88	0	0	1	13	0	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	7	88	1	13	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	6	75	1	13	1	13	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)	5	63	2	25	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child’s particular needs	5	63	2	25	1	13	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	5	63	2	25	1	13	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	4	50	3	38	1	13	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	6	75	1	13	1	13	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	6	75	1	13	1	13	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.



4 November 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Dorchester Learning Centre, Winterborne Monkton DT2 9PS

Thank you for your help in our recent visit. This letter is to tell you some of the things we found out during our visit.

- Dorchester Learning Centre gives you a good education, which means you make good progress.
- Many of you told us that you enjoy your time at the centre. We are pleased to see that you attend more often now. Well done!
- You achieve well in your lessons and courses and most of you acquire good results in your GCSEs and other courses by the time you leave in Year 11.
- You told us that you try to be healthy. We know you do lots of exercise.
- The centre keeps you safe and secure. You told us that you feel very safe at all the different sites.
- Almost all of you behave well.

We found just a few things that the centre could do to make things even better. You could help with these by getting more involved in your community and making more choices and decisions about life in the centre. We are asking your leaders to:

- provide more activities specifically for girls, increase resources for science and information and communication technology (ICT) and enable you all to take on more responsibilities
- help you to learn more about the different cultures and lifestyles across the United Kingdom.

Thank you again for your help and good luck for your futures.

Yours sincerely,

Denise Morris
Lead inspector

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