

Cedars

Inspection report

Unique reference number	131652
Local authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	381384
Inspection dates	25–26 April 2012
Lead inspector	Janet Thompson HMI

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	9–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	80
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Headteacher	Mike Fenton
Date of previous school inspection	11 March 2009
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Age group	9–16
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Introduction

Inspection team

Janet Thompson

Her Majesty's Inspector

Dave King

Additional Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed 12 full or part lessons and individual tuition taught by 10 practitioners at the Cedars base. They visited five alternative providers and the Darwin base. The lead inspector also attended the review meeting for students on alternative provision programmes. In each type of provision, inspectors held meetings with students and staff and reviewed students' work. Inspectors also met parents and carers, the chair of the management committee and a representative from the local authority and carried out a telephone interview with another of the alternative providers. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line Parent View survey in planning the inspection, observed the school's work, and looked at a range of documentation including student tracking, policy documents, quality assurance documents for alternative providers and the unit's plans for raising achievement. They also considered 11 questionnaires submitted by parents and carers.

Information about the school

Cedars provides three styles of education for students who have been excluded from mainstream school: short-term tuition packages for students who are moving to another school; longer-term places at the Cedars base for students who need additional support to improve their behaviour and attendance; and vocational curriculum packages for students in Years 10 and 11 (known as C4). Cedars also provides education for young people who are inpatients at the Darwin Centre Child and Adolescent Mental Health residential unit. These students also remain on the roll of their mainstream school. Since the last inspection, Cedars has amalgamated three teaching bases so that there is now one Cedars base, the Darwin base and a significant increase in the range of alternative Key Stage 4 provision. A few students have dual placements, remaining on the roll of their mainstream school. The majority of students are boys. All students have special educational needs and a few have statements of special educational needs. Many of the students are known to be eligible for free school meals and a small proportion of students are looked after by the local authority. Two thirds of the students attend alternative provision for all or the vast majority of their education. This is commissioned by the pupil referral unit from 11 different providers including two local colleges. The pupil referral unit has the International Schools Award.

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- This is a good pupil referral unit. The personalised curriculum options, supported by good individual support helps students to re-engage with education, improving attendance and behaviour so that they achieve well and increase the progress they make, including in literacy and mathematics. Parents and carers are highly appreciative of this success. Many students successfully move back into mainstream education and a very high proportion of students gain useful qualifications and successfully move onto education, employment or training.
- The pupil referral unit is not outstanding because teaching is satisfactory and a small minority of students, who remain on roll for longer periods of time, make satisfactory progress particularly in English, mathematics and science. In lessons at the Cedars base, teachers do not always provide enough challenge for every student.
- Students make better progress in the more practical subjects where there is stronger teaching and many are now making good progress in reading because of precisely targeted additional support.
- Nearly all students make rapid improvements in their behaviour and most attend more frequently than in previous placements, helping them to keep safe. This is consistently supported by staff who ensure there are good opportunities for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development across the provision. Students on alternative curriculum packages are well supported to take on more responsibility but there are few of these opportunities for students educated at the base.
- The leadership team provides a very strong direction to improve provision so that students succeed and move on. Strong evaluation and performance management supported by clear lines of accountability, including robust quality assurance of commissioned provision, has helped guide many of these improvements. The skilled staff work well with partners from other services to successfully address the social and emotional challenges frequently faced by students.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise the achievement of those who are on roll for longer periods of time by increasing the level of challenge and opportunities for independent problem solving in lessons.
- Over the next year, ensure all teachers have the skills and confidence to adjust work within lessons in response to different students' questions and understanding.
- Increase opportunities for those students who are taught at the Cedars base to take on more responsibility across the school day so that they become less reliant on adult guidance.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Achievement is good. Most students start with low attainment because their behaviour has previously prevented them from learning effectively or because they have rarely attended school. Careful assessment when students are first referred contributes to ensuring curriculum options closely meet the students' individual needs. This highly individualised approach supports all students well including disabled students and those with statements of special educational needs. Many students return to mainstream provision in a relatively short time. When starting points are taken into account, there is no difference in the progress made by boys and girls or between students from different backgrounds. The only groups making less progress than others are those who do not increase their attendance sufficiently and a few of those who attend the base for longer periods of time. Students at Darwin are given good opportunities to keep up to date with their mainstream school work. The sensitive approach of staff helps students to achieve well and is greatly appreciated by the students and their parents and carers.

The majority of students attend alternative provision. Their achievement is good because of the highly tailored programmes that motivate them to attend more frequently. The link mentors ensure students' achievement is closely monitored and any barriers are addressed swiftly. As a result, students' progress rapidly increases and they gain suitable functional skills and vocational qualifications, thus helping to narrow the gap between their performance and that expected for their age. In addition, the extended school provision offers some of these students well-targeted tuition at the Cedars base and these students gain mathematics and English GCSE.

Most students who attend the unit for longer periods of time also make good progress but there are some for whom there could be more challenge in lessons. Most achieve five GCSE qualifications in English, mathematics, science, art and information and communication technology. The levels gained usually show good progress from their starting point. Nevertheless, satisfactory progress was evident in many lessons at the Cedars base because, although students were attentive, they

were often too reliant on staff to take them through every step. There was more evidence of good progress in practical subjects, as students used their initiative and were encouraged to use problem-solving skills to help improve their work. This was especially evident in art and the quality of the work produced was of a high standard. Students with poor reading skills at the Cedars base have been identified and focused work to help them read unfamiliar words as well as understand their meanings has been very effective. Nearly all those in receipt of this support have made good or outstanding progress in reading. Their obvious commitment to improving their skills and pride in their achievement was evident in lessons.

Quality of teaching

Teaching is satisfactory. Although most students make good progress and achieve well, this is dependent on the highly individualised curriculum and a high level of additional individual support. For those attending the base, this is partly due to the variability in the quality of class teaching. There are strong, respectful relationships between staff and students across the types of provision ensuring there are many good opportunities for social and moral development supporting students to behave more appropriately. Students and their parents and carers are very positive about the support staff give so that students can achieve well. Teaching for groups of students at the Cedars base is variable and does not consistently enable students to develop problem-solving skills or their ability to improve their own work. Even when students ask pertinent questions, the opportunity for exploring ideas is often missed. Where teaching is stronger, there are more opportunities for students to develop a deeper understanding about what they are learning. In these situations, teachers adapt and amend the work as the lesson progresses in response to the levels of understanding of the students. In lessons where teaching is satisfactory, teachers and support staff provide too much of a lead and focus too much on getting the right answer rather than developing the students' ability to explore, revise and refine their work. Feedback to students is inconsistent. There are good examples where students are involved in reviewing their work and in these cases, the teacher gives clear development points for improvement that are understood by the students. Teachers effectively promote spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The international work ensures there are opportunities, across aspects of the curriculum, for exploring different cultures and developing an understanding of different beliefs. The poems used in English are a good example of strong vehicles to enable students to explore moral and cultural issues.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Behaviour and safety of students are good. Students make great gains in their ability to behave appropriately and nearly all of them attend much more frequently than in their previous placements. This is very much appreciated by parents and carers who notice the improvements in the students' self-confidence and appropriate social skills. Students who are looked after by the local authority have some of the best attendance but attendance is low overall. There is sustained improvement over time for most students although there remains a small group of students who have not increased their attendance sufficiently and the unit is working tirelessly with a range of partners to address this.

Students recognise that each of them struggle to behave appropriately when they start at the provision and can clearly articulate how they have been helped to improve their behaviour. Bullying rarely occurs and although there were one or two concerns expressed about bullying by parents and carers, the students were clear that the staff quickly take action to address any derogatory or insulting behaviour. Behaviour is recorded in detail and reviewed regularly so that support is adapted to address any issues effectively. Staff are very consistent in their expectations of behaviour and there is a strong framework within which individual adaptations can be made to support students with particular special educational needs. Those students who improve their behaviour and attendance rapidly are successfully supported to move back to mainstream school where they maintain their places. Students who attend alternative provision make significant progress in their ability to take on responsibility and behave appropriately in a range of situations helping them to keep safe. Students who remain at the base for longer periods of time also respond very well to the structures and support offered. They make great strides in their social skills and in their ability to get on with other students as well as staff. There are fewer opportunities for these students to take on responsibility across the school day without high levels of adult guidance. In all aspects of provision, the staff work effectively with other professionals to support students to develop a better understanding of how to keep themselves safe. This is addressed particularly sensitively at Darwin through very good partnerships with health professionals.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are good. The focus on developing individualised packages to meet the needs of every student underpins the improvements in provision over the last few years. A determined effort from all leaders to increase the progress made by students and raise their attainment has been successful. This drive is translated into high levels of commitment from staff who have received good professional development to help build upon and improve their skills. Teaching of groups at the base is improving as a result and, although it is still variable, additional support ensures students make good progress. Highly effective assessment leads to students' needs being identified well and effective provision being put in place. Safeguarding arrangements meet requirements and the headteacher also effectively retains the responsibility for child protection of any student on alternative provision. The management committee is supportive and alongside the local authority provides good governance across the range of provision. The committee members are rightly very focused on evaluating the success of individuals but have only recently begun to establish robust criteria for evaluation based on an overview of each type of provision.

Highly effective partnerships with other services have been instrumental in ensuring students attend more frequently, behave better and learn more. Clearly articulated expectations by leaders within these partnerships, supported by well-defined lines of accountability and rigorous quality assurance processes, have ensured all students have equal opportunity for success. For those in alternative provision, very regular visits from the students' mentors inform a weekly review meeting of the achievement, attendance and behaviour of every student. This enables the

headteacher to keep abreast of any issues arising so that any discrimination can be tackled and swift adaptations to the provision can be made.

The different curriculum pathways are well planned and provide core skills to support students in their return to mainstream school or to move on to further education, employment or training. The curriculum at the base is enriched through extended activities such as the performing arts, sport, a variety of visits and creating an allotment. Art also makes a significant contribution to enriching the curriculum at Darwin.

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	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September to 31 December 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data 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.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance:	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour:	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Floor standards:	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety:	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.



27 April 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of Cedars, Newcastle-under-Lyme, ST5 6BX.

Thank you for welcoming me and my colleague to the Cedars. It was especially helpful that so many of you were willing to explain how you had improved your behaviour and attendance and how the staff had helped you do this. The Cedars is a good pupil referral unit.

- The opportunities and support you are given help you to attend more frequently and behave much better than you have in previous schools. This in turn helps you to achieve more.
- The different options you have are interesting and at the same time there are good opportunities to make sure you successfully improve your literacy and mathematical skills.
- You told us how much you appreciate the support you are given and it was very pleasing to see how many of you have raised your aspirations and returned to mainstream school or moved on to further education, employment or training.
- The headteacher makes sure you are being given good opportunities for learning and that most of you are attending more frequently.
- Many of you have made rapid gains in reading as a result of the good support and additional time you are given for this.
- Sometimes in lessons, teachers do not challenge you enough and you rely too much on adults to help you complete your work successfully. In the best lessons, which are often in the more practical subjects, teachers give you opportunities to develop your own ideas and give you enough support, but not too much, so that you can solve problems for yourselves. We have asked that all teachers start to do this more frequently so that you receive the right amount of challenge in lessons. You can help by rising to this type of challenge and being confident to attempt work independently.
- Those of you attending C4 provision are given increasing opportunities to take on responsibility and you rise to the challenge. We have asked that there are more opportunities for those of you at the base to take on more responsibility and hope you will respond appropriately to these opportunities.

It was a pleasure to meet so many of you and I wish you all well for the future.

Yours sincerely

Janet Thompson
Her Majesty's Inspector

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