

Southern Cross School

Barlow Hall Road, Manchester, M21 7JJ for Key Stage 3
Jackson Crescent, Manchester, M15 5AL for Key Stage 4

Inspection dates 21–22 November 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Inadequate	4
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of students		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and students

This is a good school.

- Southern Cross is transformed for the better. At both centres and offsite the school now provides a good education to students who are at extreme risk of not benefitting from their schooling.
- Achievement is rising rapidly as students gain in confidence and self-esteem. Progress is good at Key Stage 3. At Key Stage 4 students are gaining good GCSEs in increasing numbers. They are improving their basic skills of reading, writing and mathematics.
- Staff are 100% committed to the students. They have great belief in them and are determined to break the cycle of underachievement students have experienced. Teaching is good with some of outstanding quality in Key Stage 4.
- At both centres the school is calm and orderly. Very thorough management procedures and exceptional teamwork ensure students and staff are safe and that lessons continue without interruption.
- Strong and effective leadership at both centres has turned the school's fortunes around, especially at Key Stage 3, where provision was poor. Leaders have earned the confidence and respect of staff, students and parents. There has been a successful focus on improving teaching and learning. At both centres there is good capacity for further improvement as confidence and resilience grow.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- There is scope to improve teaching even further.
- The school does not yet have a governing body in place and therefore has no parental or community representation in its governance.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed six lessons, three at the Key Stage 3 site and three at the Key Stage 4 Castlefield Campus.
- Discussions were held with senior staff, teachers and teaching support staff at both sites, including with staff responsible for students taught off-site. The inspector talked informally with students. Discussions were also held with representatives of external agencies and with members of the Interim Executive Board. Documentation provided by the school was scrutinised.
- No responses were received through the on-line parent questionnaire, Parent View. A parent survey carried out by the school was analysed.

Inspection team

Brian Padgett, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Full report

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

Information about this school

- Southern Cross is one of three special schools that form the Manchester Federation of BESD Special Schools. The school is located on two sites. The Key Stage 3 centre is in Chorlton and Key Stage 4 at the Castlefield Campus in Hulme. Key Stage 4 students are taught alongside Key Stage 4 students from the other BESD day school in the federation. The work of the school is managed by an interim executive board.
- The school was placed in special measures in June 2011. Since then it has been subject to monitoring visits by HMI. The visits in March and June 2012 judged improvement to be good.
- The Key Stage 3 centre is led by an acting head of centre. A new head of day schools took up his post in September 2012. He is based at the Castlefield Campus.
- The school provides for students who have complex behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. A high proportion also has learning difficulties, mental health issues and/or medical conditions. All students have a statement of special educational needs that includes challenging behaviour as a major element. Places are allocated by the local authority and students may be registered with the school at any time during their secondary school career. A number of students have not attended a school for a considerable period of time before joining Southern Cross. The school also provides for students who are taught off-site.
- Most students are boys of White British heritage. Five students are looked after by the local authority. The great majority of students are known to be eligible for free school meals and the school is, therefore, in receipt of the additional government funding known as the pupil premium.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- The Interim Executive Board should continue with its plans to become a governing body, fully representative of parents and the community.
- Teaching should be improved further, where necessary, by:
 - encouraging students to take a more active part in lessons, with teachers and support staff doing less for them and asking more of them by way of contributions during lessons, especially through more open questioning
 - planning for and meeting the individual needs of students within a lesson, where assessments indicate these are significantly different.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of students is good

- Students arrive at the school with levels of attainment that are very low, typically five years behind those of students of their age. All have had a poor start to their schooling. They lack belief in themselves and trust in teachers.
- Once settled, students make good and sometimes exceptional progress. It is increasingly common for a student without additional learning needs to make up all of the ground he or she has lost. In Key Stage 3, for example, students working at the level of the average 7 year-old in Year 7 work at levels typical of 14 year-olds at Year 9. In 2012, five Year 9 students gained a pass in GCSE English. At Key Stage 4, the proportion of students who gain qualifications is improving year-on-year. In 2012, five students in Year 11 gained the equivalent of five good GCSEs where none had ever done so before. Students in Key Stage 4 are having increasing examination success in a wider range of subjects, including English, science, history, information and communications technology and physical education.
- For students with learning difficulties, and for those educated off-site, the emphasis is on the acquisition of the core skills of literacy and numeracy. Such pupils at Key Stage 3 often make rapid progress in their reading ages and at Key Stage 4, increasing numbers of students leave with a Level 1 or Level 2 qualification in literacy and/or numeracy.
- The vast majority of students secure places at colleges of further education at 16.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is good. There is teaching of the highest quality in Key Stage 4, where provision has been better for longer than in Key Stage 3. There is no inadequate teaching.
- Teachers plan lessons well in many respects. Lessons are interesting, relevant and varied. Teachers assess well and discuss students' learning with senior staff to see whether students are making as much progress as they might. Teaching assistants are an indispensable presence in lessons, supporting and encouraging students with their learning.
- The improvements in the professional quality of teachers' work have been an important factor in the school's growing success with students. However the levels of dedication of teachers and teaching assistants to the students are the more striking. They know students very well. They are patient, positive and persistent with each one, seeing through the barriers students often erect to protect themselves. They believe the best of each student and their belief gradually raises the students' self-esteem and enables them to become learners again. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good.
- The quality of teamwork is another strong feature in each centre. The importance of secure routines is fully understood. Each member of staff knows the importance of being in the right place at the right time for the students. Staff look out for each other. The calm and well-ordered ethos of the school is a direct consequence of the staff's vigilance and diligence.
- The outstanding teaching seen in some lessons stretches students to the very limit of their abilities. In lessons of this quality, it is possible to see, through their responses, just how bright and capable some students are. On occasions, in less effective lessons, too much is done for students and not enough asked of them by way of open questions. Sometimes students' work is not sufficiently well-matched to their next steps in learning. Staff challenge discrimination when this occurs.
- A strength of the provision is the school's work with students most at risk of underachievement; those whose condition makes it very hard for them to be in school or in a class. Both centres have nurture groups, within school, that provide an alternate and more flexible approach to learning for these students. Also, both centres run teams who teach students off-site. Both nurture groups and off-site students make up significant ground because of the quality of work of these staff, who often work detached from the school, visiting students in their homes and

working closely with families and other agencies. Increasingly, they feel part of the school and well-supported.

The behaviour and safety of students are good

- The behaviour of students is much improved, particularly at Key Stage 3. The school on both sites is calm and orderly and a walk around either centre shows students getting on with their work in lessons. Parents are confident that their children are doing well at school and believe they are safe there. They have no complaints. Through school councils, leaders know students trust staff to protect them, from bullying, for example.
- The very nature of students' behavioural, emotional and social difficulties leaves no room for lapses in vigilance. Leaders and staff know this. The routines and practices for managing behaviour are well understood and practiced by all staff. Students demonstrating challenging behaviour know they must leave the class and return only when ready to resume work. Students are well aware of the school's rewards and sanctions and accept these. Staff are extremely effective in recognising symptoms of problems, diverting attention, finding attributes to praise and, if need be, escorting and supervising students out of class. Routines work so seamlessly that, to a visitor, nothing appears untoward.
- Relationships between staff at all levels and students are very positive. There is much good humour and light-hearted banter. Students' attitudes to learning are generally good and this can be seen in the pride they take in the presentation of their work.
- Attendance has proved hard to improve to the levels seen in mainstream secondary schools. It stands at 88% in Key Stage 3 and 76% in Key Stage 4. However, many students have excellent attendance records, such as girls and the students educated off-site. Some students have attendance as low as 60%. While leaders acknowledge this is clearly not good enough, they point to the students' previous experience of school, when many of the youngsters did not attend at all.
- Falling levels of short-term exclusions provide evidence of students' improved behaviour and greater enjoyment of school. It is also testimony to the school's willingness to be flexible about provision, to find out what students can cope with and work with them to achieve this.

The leadership and management are good

- The centres are exceptionally well led and have improved correspondingly. The net result is that students of all groups have every opportunity to achieve well. The leaders of the Key Stage 3 centre have had the more difficult journey because this is where improvement was most needed. The head of centre for Key Stage 3, very well supported by her assistant head of centre, secured the confidence and respect of students, staff and parents. The transformation of Key Stage 3 was completed by a successful transfer to new, purpose-built accommodation in September 2012. Both centres now have a building they can be proud of and improved facilities through which they are extending the curriculum. Safeguarding procedures are rigorous on both sites.
- There was a change in leadership at the Key Stage 4 Castlefield centre in September 2012. This was managed well. The new head of day school and his new leadership team have made a good start with no loss in the momentum for improvement. The ability of both centres to absorb changes in staff is a strong indication of their increasing resilience and strength, particularly as the students find change hard to accommodate and require much preparation. All staff work very hard to ensure that the transition from Key Stage 3 to 4 is as smooth as possible.
- The leaders of both centres have led a relentless drive to improve teaching and learning, including through the professional development of staff. The work of teachers and the progress of students are rigorously checked at regular points with discussions if students fall behind. Teachers are accountable for students' progress and achievement through rigorous performance

management procedures. Teachers with leadership responsibilities and subject leaders are developing their roles and all staff take on extra responsibilities, including teaching support staff. For example, in Key Stage 4, support staff run the school council and are active in monitoring bullying, for instance.

- A particular strength of the school, also attributable to its leadership, is the length to which it goes to meet the needs of its learners. There is a clear determination to provide for each student in whichever way is practical. Hence, if a student is unable to come to the school, then staff will go to the student. If students find it hard to cope in class, then nurture groups provide an alternative approach. However, the focus on learning remains paramount.
 - The school has forged very good relationships with external agencies to support students. The partnerships with the child and adolescent mental health service and with the Connexions service are of first quality. The learning mentor in Key Stage 3 and the off-site teams also have expert knowledge of statutory and voluntary agencies that are able to help with students.
 - The centres have not disaggregated the pupil premium from other budget headings as yet. However, whereas in most schools only a minority of students are eligible, at Southern Cross almost all students are eligible and have broadly the same call on additional funding.
 - **The governance of the school:**
 - The federation’s interim executive board and the local authority have provided reasonable oversight of the centres throughout the period of special measures. Subject to the proposals of the local authority, which is deliberating on the future organisation of its special schools, the interim executive board is preparing to make way for a governing body. The governing body will include parental and community interests. The transition is being made sensitively so as to maintain the current strengths in oversight for the school, such as its knowledge of teaching, staffing and achievement issues within the school.
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What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	105623
Local authority	Manchester
Inspection number	384941

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	67
Appropriate authority	Interim executive board
Chair	Pauline Newman
Principal of the Federation	Angela Schofield
Date of previous school inspection	15 June 2011
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