

Cherry Tree Learning Centre

Overfield Road, Russell's Hall Estate, Dudley, DY1 2NX

Inspection dates 26–27 June 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- All groups of learners make good and often outstanding progress, especially in science.
- Teaching is consistently good and sometimes outstanding.
- Staff are skilled in supporting pupils in their work and in their personal development. They find the best ways of helping them to catch up and to make the progress they are capable of as soon as they join the centre.
- Pupils' behaviour is outstanding. Pupils feel exceptionally well supported. They respond well to the very strong atmosphere of respect and compassion. All pupils feel extremely safe.
- Team work is a strength of the centre. Staff feel valued and supported by leaders. Leaders and managers continue to improve the quality of teaching and raise pupils' achievement.
- The centre is highly respected by other schools and other agencies. It has an excellent reputation in helping pupils to re-engage in their education and overcome the difficulties they face.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Not enough pupils make outstanding progress, especially in mathematics.
- Pupils are not given enough opportunities to assess their own progress towards their targets.
- The progress different groups of pupils make is not checked often enough or compared with national standards.
- The local authority has not acted swiftly enough to ensure the management committee can fulfil its governance role fully.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed six lessons, of which one was a joint observation with the head of centre. Observations of planning and discussions were also held with a home tuition teacher and the teacher at the hospital.
- Informal discussions were held with two groups of pupils and inspectors listened to pupils read.
- There were no responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View), but inspectors took into account the recent questionnaire returned by pupils and parents. Returns from 35 questionnaires completed by staff were also considered.
- A meeting was held with the local authority head of service, who is also a member of the management committee, and a telephone conversation took place with the chair of the management committee. Discussions were held with some key support agencies, the Assistant Director of Children Services, head of the centre, senior staff and teachers responsible for specific subjects and areas of provision, including special educational needs.
- Inspectors evaluated documentation, including information on pupils' current progress, the curriculum and development plans, as well as procedures and records on safeguarding, behaviour and attendance.

Inspection team

Mary Hinds, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Glen Goddard	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Cherry Tree Learning Centre is a pupil referral unit which provides an alternative education for pupils in Key Stages 1 to 4 who have diagnosed medical, mental health or anxiety conditions. At the time of the inspection, the majority of pupils were in Key Stages 3 and 4.
- Pupils are dual registered with their mainstream schools and attend the centre either on a part-time or full-time basis. The length of time spent at Cherry Tree varies greatly. Reintegration back into mainstream or special school is the main aim whenever possible.
- The hospital service is based at Russell's Hall Hospital, whereas the home tuition service is co-ordinated from the main centre. Both provide continuity of education for pupils unable to attend mainstream schools for medical reasons.
- Almost all pupils are of White British heritage.
- The majority of pupils have special educational needs, including those supported at through school action plus or a statement of special educational needs. This is well above average.
- The proportion of pupils for whom the centre receives the pupil premium, such as those known to be eligible for free school meals, those looked after by the local authority, of which there are a few, and those from service families is above average.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching and pupils' rate of progress, especially in mathematics, by:
 - ensuring all teachers identify what pupils need to achieve within lessons so that they are able to assess their own progress towards their targets in all key subjects
 - making sure that pupils are taught systematically the most effective methods to calculate in mathematics.
- Strengthen leadership and management by:
 - making sure that the management of the centre meets the new governance responsibilities by September 2013
 - evaluating the progress made by groups of pupils regularly and against national information.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Pupils often have low levels of attainment when they start at the centre. Most have had considerable disruption to their education and have a previous history of non-attendance due to their health, social and emotional difficulties.
- As a result, pupils have considerable gaps in their learning when they join the centre. They often lack confidence in their ability to achieve. Many have negative attitudes to school. On arrival, staff are skilled in assessing where pupils are in their learning and in their personal development. They carefully plan programmes of study that are well matched to individual needs.
- Gaps in learning are identified and pupils have targeted support. No time is wasted. For example, some pupils are taught how to link letters to sounds (phonics) and to practise learning their times tables, as soon as they get to the centre, during breakfast club.
- All groups of learners make good and often rapid progress, in the centre, at the hospital and through home tuition, in English, mathematics and science. Some pupils make outstanding progress, especially in science. However, not enough pupils make rapid progress in other subjects particularly in mathematics. This is because there is no clear sequence for teaching pupils how to work out problems effectively, especially in division.
- As pupils' progress speeds up, more and more are reaching attainment levels that are expected nationally for their age. However, this varies considerably depending on different groups of learners and the time pupils spend in the centre.
- Older pupils make good progress in gaining accredited qualifications. Over the last three years, almost all pupils gained at least one GCSE at A* to G. In 2012, nearly half the pupils achieved five A* to C grades including English and mathematics which is broadly in line with the national average. From their below average starting points, this represents good progress for most pupils.
- Reading, writing and communication skills are beginning to be developed across the curriculum. Staff have high expectations and teach these skills regularly and across subjects and topics. Most pupils have a well-developed approach to reading.
- Analysis of pupil information and examination results show that all pupils achieve as well as each other, including those pupils eligible for the pupil premium. This funding is currently delegated to mainstream schools but leaders now request a proportion of this and are exceptionally creative in making sure it has the greatest effect. Some pupils are provided with laptops to study at home in preparation for their examinations. One pupil received equestrian work experience, and later went on to study this subject at college. Other pupils have one-to-one mentoring support.
- The proportion of pupils who return to their mainstream schools and/or successfully move on to further education, employment or training is good because the centre prepares them very well for their next stage of development academically and personally.

The quality of teaching

is good

- Teaching is at least good and some is outstanding. Teachers use their good subject knowledge and excellent understanding of what pupils need to learn next to secure good or better progress,

an increase in pupils' confidence as learners and better attendance rates.

- Teachers make learning interesting and relevant for pupils, whether they are in school, at home or in hospital. They provide practical activities which motivate pupils to want to learn on their own and with their classmates. All pupils are fully included in lessons as adults provide good support and encouragement, sometimes through scribing for a pupil, or paraphrasing the teacher's questions.
- Individual assessments are used well to design personalised programmes which motivate pupils to learn at a good rate. Teaching is outstanding when staff adapt activities so that different pupils can learn at different levels according to their abilities.
- Most staff are very skilled at questioning pupils to assess their level of understanding and adapt the work accordingly. The most effective teachers encourage pupils to explain their thinking to others and to clarify how they have worked things out.
- Teaching is especially successful when staff make sure pupils have a clear understanding of what they will be learning. They provide pointers for pupils to identify and measure how well they have done. Pupils' work books show some inconsistencies in how well teachers identify targets and steps to success, both within lessons and for a series of lessons. Some teachers do not provide pupils with the opportunity to assess their own progress.
- Mathematical skills are not taught systematically. Pupils are not always taught how to work out calculations using the most effective method, particularly when they are solving problems which require them to divide accurately.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Staff have high expectations for behaviour and, as a consequence, pupils behave exceptionally well. Their conduct in lessons, outside the classroom and when visiting places in the community is outstanding. Pupils' behaviour was exemplary when they visited Himley Hall, skilfully flying kites together and feeding the ducks.
- Case studies show that pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning are totally transformed in a very short period of time after they have been admitted to the centre. Pupils say, 'This school is like a family... we all had low self-esteem when we came here but now it's high, because staff give us lots of praise for our work...'
- Staff are very supportive. They provide praise and encouragement in a timely fashion, so that pupils have the confidence to 'have a go', to explore and experiment. As a consequence, pupils' self-esteem grows. They quickly begin to believe that they can aim high and their attitudes to learning soon become extremely positive. Pupils told inspectors, 'Staff don't judge you, which is fantastic, they accept you for who you are...'
- Relationships are exceptionally strong. Pupils enjoy their lessons and they take every opportunity to engage in their learning, to talk to each other, including joining in activities at lunch time such as singing in the choir with the staff.
- Parents who spoke to inspectors were highly appreciative of all the centre does for their children. They say communication is excellent, and they feel exceptionally well supported, through a variety of ways, including the parent support group. Parents told inspectors that their children receive excellent co-ordinated support from the centre, because the staff are flexible and always strive to meet the individual needs of their children.

- Pupils are fully informed about different forms of bullying and say that the rare occurrences are dealt with promptly. They have every confidence that staff will sort out any worries they may have. All say they feel safe and they make suitable choices to keep themselves safe.
- Pupils respond well to the many opportunities to take responsibility and are often part of the decision-making process, including the appointment of the new deputy head of centre.
- The centre rigorously tracks pupils' attendance and figures reveal impressive gains in attendance for all pupils. Leaders are not complacent and have additional plans to ensure that attendance rates continue to improve still further.

The leadership and management are good

- The head of centre and deputies provide very strong leadership. They are totally focused on the well-being of pupils, so that they become confident and motivated learners. Senior leaders have secured the dedication and commitment of all staff who work highly effectively as a team towards their goal of excellence. Staff morale is exceptionally high.
- Leaders have accurately assessed the strengths and weaknesses of the centre and there are suitable plans in place to maintain and improve provision still further. There is a programme of checks to find out what is going well and what needs to be done further in order to meet their demanding targets.
- All staff meticulously check the progress pupils make every six weeks to check the effectiveness of support and work to help pupils catch up with their learning, such as focused reading sessions.
- Teaching is good and in some cases outstanding because leaders provide the right balance of support and challenge. Staff are well supported through the appraisal process and have well-targeted support and training.
- Subjects and topics have been adapted well to meet the needs of all pupils so that all achieve well. Learning opportunities make an outstanding contribution to pupils' personal development and behaviour. The centre has a strong personal, social and health education programme that, together with excellent opportunities for enrichment, makes a good contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. A variety of educational visits and visitors broaden pupils' cultural and social horizons.
- Older pupils are able to follow a range of GCSE courses and gain the quality of accreditation which equips them very well for further education or training. Year 11 pupils have a separate personal, social, health and citizenship programme called 'learning for life'. This develops life skills, including pupils' independence. Pupils are given guidance with writing applications for college and writing their curricula vitae. They plan journeys using public transport and visit local art exhibitions, the local shopping centre, and major attractions in Birmingham such as the German Christmas market.
- The centre works very effectively with parents, who are invited to regular progress reviews attended by all the professionals working with their child. Links with schools and other key partners are excellent. The centre works closely with all mainstream schools, health agencies and the educational welfare service. The support that the centre offers is recognised as having a significant impact on the lives of many young people.
- The local authority provides light touch support for the centre because of the good outcomes it achieves. Leaders request advice as and when required, the most recent being guidance in developing and putting in place a system for tracking pupils' progress. However, the progress of

groups of pupils is not checked regularly enough or compared with the national figures in order to evaluate precisely how well the centre is performing.

- Arrangements for recruiting staff and for keeping pupils safe at the centre meet statutory requirements.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- Currently, officers from Children’s Services at the local authority are responsible for the line management of the head of centre, corporate arrangements for recruitment, and for the financial management of the budget. .
- Members of the management committee have expertise in a range of fields, from educationalists, representatives from Children’s Services and health professionals. They have an in-depth understanding of the needs of pupils. They receive regular information about the centres’ effectiveness and ask increasingly demanding questions, particularly in relation to pupils’ attendance, behaviour and the effect this has on their progress. The committee checks how well the centre’s funding is being managed, including the use of the pupil premium.
- The management committee is suitably informed and eager to take on new governance responsibilities, including the responsibility for checking on pupils’ progress, managing the performance of staff and being key drivers in the overall effectiveness of the centre. However, this has not happened as quickly as it should have.

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	103769
Local authority	Dudley
Inspection number	400654

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	91
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Chair	Helen Georgiou
Headteacher	Jane Cooper
Date of previous school inspection	16 March 2010
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