

# Sycamore Short Stay School

Sycamore Green, Old Park Farm Estate, Dudley, DY1 3QE

**Inspection dates** 11–12 November 2014

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	<b>Requires improvement</b>	<b>3</b>
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- The progress of younger pupils in reading, writing and mathematics continues to lag behind that of older pupils.
- Over time the approach taken with younger pupils has not focused enough on helping them make the most of their academic ability. The impact of this has not yet been fully eradicated.
- There has been too much variation in the quality of teaching and learning. This has resulted in the progress of some pupils over time being limited.
- Quiet rooms for withdrawal have uncarpeted floors, bare walls and, sometimes, sharp corners on which pupils might hurt themselves. This does not encourage them to adopt a more positive approach to re-engaging with learning.
- Although the use of the quiet rooms is recorded and monitored this is not supporting the effective analysis of the use of the rooms over time and their impact on behaviour.
- The number of short term exclusions, although reducing, is still too high.
- New additions to the leadership team have not yet been in post long enough to have had a major impact on developing the curriculum and assessment, and in supporting teachers.

### The school has the following strengths

- Senior leadership, including governance, now has a clear vision for taking the unit forward following a lengthy period of re-organisation.
- Since the appointment of the headteacher there is a much stronger focus on helping pupils make the best possible progress in all classes, especially in reading, writing and mathematics. This is helping the school to improve.
- The curriculum is developing well and is effectively engaging most pupils.
- Training and development for staff are now supporting rising standards across the unit.
- The behaviour and attendance of the majority of pupils have improved. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted increasingly well. This is seen, for example, in their ability to collaborate, share and better appreciate the views of others.
- Since pupils are more focused on learning they are better able to show their full potential and are now well supported to help them return to mainstream schools.
- The work of the outreach team is held in high regard throughout the local authority area. It is successful in keeping primary-aged exclusions in Dudley to a minimum.

## Information about this inspection

- Four lessons were observed, covering all the classes, and one of these was undertaken jointly with the headteacher. This included observing the dual-registered group of mainstream pupils.
- The work of the outreach team was observed through a meeting between the leader of the service and teachers supporting a pupil in one of the local mainstream schools.
- Meetings were held with senior leaders, including the leader of the outreach service, the recently appointed leaders for curriculum and assessment, the learning mentor, an assistant director of education and the local authority's head of service responsible for pupil referral units.
- The views of parents were gathered from the unit's own parental questionnaire. There were not enough responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, to generate an analysis.
- The inspector met with a group of pupils and spoke to pupils whenever possible throughout the inspection in order to ensure that their views were heard and taken into account.
- The views of staff were gathered from their questionnaires and from discussions held throughout the inspection.
- Students' work was looked at during lessons and a more detailed scrutiny was made of a sample of books and folders, looking at their work over time. Some pupils were heard reading, while case studies provided detail on the progress made by specific pupils.
- The inspector looked at a range of written documents, including information on the progress and achievement of pupils, teachers' marking and planning, the unit's own evaluation of its effectiveness and development planning, and a range of policies and procedures, including those for safeguarding.

## Inspection team

Martyn Groucutt, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- The Sycamore Short Stay School is a pupil referral unit serving the local authority area of Dudley. It provides education for pupils between the ages of five and 15 who have been, or who at serious risk of being, permanently excluded as a result of their behaviour or associated difficulties.
- In addition to providing education for its own pupils, the unit also provides a six week part-time course for small groups of secondary-aged pupils who are at serious risk of being permanently excluded. They remain on the registers of their mainstream schools, which they also attend while they follow the course.
- There is also an outreach service, using the expertise of the unit, to support mainstream schools that are having problems with individual pupils as a result of their very challenging behaviours.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils who are supported by the pupil premium in the unit is well above average. The pupil premium is additional government funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals or who are in the care of the local authority.
- The vast majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds.
- All the pupils are disabled or have special educational needs, focused around emotional, social or behavioural, and associated difficulties.
- There is no use made of alternative provision to provide education off-site.
- The unit has recently been part of a major local authority restructuring of its pupil referral unit provision. As a result, the provision reduced from three units to one from September 2013 under a single headteacher and moved to a new single site from September 2014.
- From September 2014 the leadership team was increased by the appointment of two leaders responsible for enhancing the curriculum and assessment.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that all teaching is good or better through monitoring and supporting weaker teaching.
- Reduce the remaining gap in the achievement between different classes by ensuring that teaching of younger pupils is always focused primarily on raising standards in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Review policy and practice around the management of behaviour, with a particular focus on:
  - reducing the amount of time that some pupils spend out of class as a result of their behaviour
  - improving the recording and monitoring of the use made of the quiet rooms by pupils who are out of lessons
  - improving the quality of the quiet rooms by putting in some form of floor and wall coverings to reduce the risk of any pupils in a very agitated state hurting themselves
  - reducing the number of fixed-term exclusions.
- Support the recently appointed curriculum and assessment leaders so that they can:
  - develop ways in which the expertise of unit staff can be used in supporting mainstream colleagues
  - gain expertise by working alongside mainstream colleagues in understanding what pupils' work across the whole ability range looks like and keeping up to date with developments in schools
  - share best practice, support colleagues and lead training within the pupil referral unit, helping them overcome the possible isolation of working in a very small provision.

## Inspection judgements

### The leadership and management requires improvement

- During the period of reorganisation of the pupil referral units there was considerable upheaval. There had also been a diversity in the views of different leaders as to what constituted an effective unit. Overall there was not enough focus on improving pupils' reading, writing and mathematics.
- When the current senior leadership took over the whole provision for behaviour pupil referral units, teachers had different ideas of best practice and expected outcomes. For a time this newly created single pupil referral unit was still operating on three different sites. In September 2014 the three sites were brought together, which has eased some of the difficulties of management.
- The unit is now in a much stronger position and is moving forward. Many pupils are now making good or better progress in reading, writing and mathematics, particularly the older pupils. However, some elements of the improvements are very recent and have not yet made their full impact.
- The two new leaders with responsibility for curriculum and assessment have started their work but have only been in post for a short time so that impact is limited. An example of the impact they are already having is in the work they are doing alongside leaders from other schools looking at the best forms for assessing pupils' work as they make progress through the National Curriculum.
- The headteacher and deputy headteacher have a clear and dynamic vision for the unit. This is based firmly on supporting pupils to make the most of their abilities to learn, while also becoming much more able to overcome their problems around behaviour. There is now a much stronger focus on successful return to mainstream, supported by better data that shows pupils' performance is now improving.
- The move to one site has enabled more effective monitoring of teaching, planning and assessment. This supports effective appraisal and the setting of annual objectives. The personal and professional needs of staff are taken into account alongside those of the unit as a whole. Teachers know the links between their pay and performance. There is evidence that improved teaching is now leading to better progress and achievement, although there are still differences between classes.
- Leaders use data effectively to monitor the progress of individuals and of different groups. For example, by checking on the impact of the pupil premium they ensure that disadvantaged pupils are doing as well as other pupils in the unit. This demonstrates a commitment to ensuring equality of opportunity and to tackle discrimination, since learning is based on individual needs, while all identified groups perform equally well over time.
- Additional funds to support primary-aged sport have also been used well. The use of professional coaches has helped to enthuse pupils and raise participation levels. However, the longer term impact of this has not been monitored in any detail.
- Generally, the unit's evaluation of its own effectiveness is now thorough and this helps it to identify key areas for continuing and sustaining the improvements that are now taking place.
- The quality of the curriculum is good. It is based firmly on the National Curriculum and taught through specific lessons or topic work. There is now a much stronger focus on reading, writing and mathematics that helps pupils to make better progress. The provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is also stronger. The introduction of philosophy as a subject is enabling pupils to think more deeply. They are more able to collaborate, working with others and accept that other people's views and ideas are as valid as their own. This is helping them prepare for life in modern Britain.
- Advice and guidance around careers, including access to independent advice, for Key Stage 3 and 4 pupils is largely covered through topic work, since this better supports the key aim of returning pupils to mainstream schools. The guidance provides pupils with the advice they need to prepare them for subsequent stages of their education or for the world of work.

- Many pupils are potentially very vulnerable. Safeguarding, including working successfully alongside other professionals to support pupils and sometimes their wider families, fully meets current requirements. The unit works hard to engage with parents, starting with an initial meeting before their child starts at the unit. Sometimes the unit is able to support parents in their dealings with other agencies, such as medical services, in helping their children.
- The headteacher and senior leaders do not make full use of the information they gather about the use of the quiet rooms. This leads to the value of these rooms, in terms of pupils' behaviour and personal development, being somewhat limited and does not encourage a reduction of their use over time.
- The unit is developing links with mainstream schools. The outreach service is already very successful and all the borough's primary schools buy its services and speak very highly of their impact. There is an acceptance that links bring mutual benefits and this process is developing. For example, the expertise of the unit is shared with schools, while staff in the unit are being helped in terms of keeping up to date. They benefit from training and being helped to overcome the feeling of isolation that can come from working in a very small institution, although this is another area currently being developed.
- The local authority, having completed the reorganisation of its pupil referral units, provides good support to help the unit sustain the improvements that are now becoming apparent. It has sought successfully to give more powers and responsibility to the unit's management committee.
- **The governance of the school:**
  - Members of the recently constituted management committee offer a wide range of very relevant expertise and knowledge, including around safeguarding. However, they were not fully aware of the issue around the analysis of the use of the quiet rooms. They are committed to the unit and fully support the drive to improve standards of teaching and learning. They know the unit well and provide support and challenge as leaders strive to improve standards. Their involvement brings a good understanding of the range of subjects taught, the quality of teaching and the effectiveness of provision. They work with the local authority to set challenging targets for the headteacher and have a good understanding of the process for setting annual targets for teachers. They understand the links between pay and performance. They also understand the finances of the unit, including a good awareness of the pupil premium, the way it is used to target individual needs and the impact it is having.

## The behaviour and safety of pupils

## requires improvement

### Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement. While most are able to show significant improvement since joining the unit, a minority still cause disruption that results in them being taken out of lessons too often and for too long. This has a negative impact on their ability to learn and make progress.
- When pupils are withdrawn from a class, sometimes in an extremely agitated state, they go to a quiet room. Usually this is for a short time, the exact length being determined by the pupil who decides when to return to class. Use of the rooms is always recorded but lacks detail that could be used to support a better analysis of the impact of the rooms, with the aim of helping individuals to use them less over time.
- Behaviour around the site is generally well managed with effective supervision by adults. Individual behaviour programmes are monitored daily and in most cases are effective in supporting better behaviour. Pupils generally develop positive relationships with staff, who work hard to build a rapport. Staff are positive role models and encourage pupils to develop a self-belief that was often lacking.
- A majority of pupils are now successfully re-engaging with learning, showing much more positive behaviour than when they joined the unit. This is reflected in their books. Often pupils take pride in their work and it is presented well.

## Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure requires improvement. The number of exclusions, although reducing, is still too high.
- The quiet rooms have bare floors and walls. In certain circumstances it would be possible for a pupil in a very agitated state to hurt themselves as there is no padding, especially around sharp edges. The rooms look 'cold' and do not encourage pupils to develop more positive attitudes.
- Safeguarding arrangements are otherwise robust and the unit often works alongside other agencies in a positive way. For example, effective work supports pupils who might be at risk of sexual exploitation.
- Pupils say that because the unit is small and they are encouraged to get on well together there is little bullying. They say that when incidents occur there is always a member of staff near at hand to deal with it. They know what bullying is from work covered in lessons and that there are different types of bullying. They have done work in class on the importance of being safe online and the dangers of misusing social networking sites.
- Parents and their pupils overwhelmingly say that their new site is safe and they feel protected when they are in the unit. Safety extends to activities out of school because risk assessments are detailed and carried out as a matter of course before an activity is allowed to go ahead.
- Attendance is low but is improving significantly. Many pupils attend very regularly and the unit works very hard with the small minority who do not. This includes the use of pupil premium money, since most of those with poor attendance are disadvantaged pupils. Additional attendance officer time is bought to enable close work to be undertaken with families. Over the last year this has had a very positive impact in improving attendance.

## The quality of teaching

### requires improvement

- The quality of teaching requires improvement primarily because there is too wide a variation in the outcomes of different classes. Over time teachers working with the younger pupils were not always encouraged to place their main priority on teaching reading, writing and mathematics. As a result fewer pupils made expected or better progress than might otherwise have been anticipated. The gap is now narrowing between the performance of the younger and the older pupils, but it has not yet disappeared.
- There is now a much sharper focus on helping pupils make rapid progress in learning so that they can narrow the gap in attainment with others of the same age. This is seen as an important element of helping pupils return to mainstream education, alongside support to help them adopt more positive behaviour. It reflects clear improvement in provision and effectiveness. However, not all teachers have been as effective as the best in supporting pupils to learn and behave well. In some classes a few pupils spend too long out of the room as a result of their behaviour.
- Where teaching is good pupils enjoy their work and standards are rising. In such cases the teaching of reading, writing, communication and mathematics is effective. Pupils respond well to the positive questioning of their teachers. They are able to show their understanding and also discuss and develop their ideas. They are able to listen to other views and accept that these might be just as valid as their own.
- Teachers work very well with their teaching assistants, creating good team work in classrooms. Opportunities to work in small groups provides pupils with effective support. These groups, together with careful planning that enables individual needs to be addressed, support the good progress that is increasingly being seen, especially among the older pupils.
- Marking of work is done regularly and usually contains helpful praise and encouragement. In the books of the older pupils there is often comment on how work could be even better. There is also advice on how pupils can make progress towards meeting their targets in English and mathematics. This is not so often seen in the books of the younger pupils and there remains a lack of clarity about expectations for the

marking of their work.

- The work done by staff in supporting the group of part-time students who attend the secondary level course to try to prevent their exclusion is effective. The pupils on the course participate well and this helps them develop a much greater self-confidence and self-belief. This helps them change their behaviour and attitudes towards school and to become increasingly positive.
- The outreach team, working around the local authority, provides a very effective service. They work side-by-side with mainstream colleagues, using their expertise to help schools provide help and support for pupils at risk of exclusion. They also engage them in positive learning. At present the buy-in from secondary schools is not so large as that from primary and the team are seeking ways of addressing this.

### The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Attainment is low, especially among pupils who are older when they first join the unit. This reflects the previous difficulties encountered by pupils before they were permanently excluded from mainstream education.
- Increasing numbers of pupils are making expected or better than expected progress, particularly among the older ones. However, a performance gap remains and it is clear that achievement and progress is not as good among the younger pupils.
- The unit's own data show that standards are rising in reading, writing and mathematics. This is because of the clear expectations that all teachers will focus on academic outcomes, including providing daily reading sessions. Standards remain below those found nationally but, from their individual starting points, increasing numbers of pupils are now being supported to fulfil their potential. This reflects the improving capability of the unit to ensure that pupils are being stretched.
- Teachers now meet with the headteacher every half term to review the progress of pupils in their class. Where this progress is not as good as expected, or performance targets might be missed, additional support is arranged to get pupils back on track. Reviews of behaviour are also a regular feature of the unit.
- Because the needs of each individual are identified and supported the talents of the most able can be identified. They achieve well. This was reflected in the recent publication of a poem written by one of the pupils in an anthology, of which she and the unit are rightly proud.
- Disadvantaged pupils also achieve well. Pupil premium spending has been targeted on specific pupils, providing them with additional support from an educational psychologist. This funding is also used to buy in additional attendance officer time. These initiatives have enabled this group to narrow their attainment gap with the other pupils, although it is hard to measure over time because of fluctuations as some pupils are re-integrated and new ones arrive. The unit's analysis and inspection evidence show there is no significant difference between the performance disadvantaged pupils and of other groups during their time in the unit.
- Those who are disabled or have special educational needs beyond those associated with their behaviour are well supported. This is because their needs are identified early, if they had not already been identified prior to being admitted. The individual approach to learning means that these pupils are well supported. From their individual starting points they make progress at the same rate as the other pupils in their class.



## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	134768
<b>Local authority</b>	Dudley
<b>Inspection number</b>	447775

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

<b>Type of school</b>	Pupil referral unit
<b>School category</b>	Pupil referral unit
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	5-15
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	23
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The local authority
<b>Chair</b>	Michael Price
<b>Headteacher</b>	Bene Willis
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	October 2011
<b>Telephone number</b>	01384 818237
<b>Fax number</b>	01384 818681
<b>Email address</b>	info@sycamore.dudley.sch.uk

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'raising concerns and making complaints about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk). If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).



You can use Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school. Ofsted will use the information parents and carers provide when deciding which schools to inspect and when and as part of the inspection.

You can also use Parent View to find out what other parents and carers think about schools in England. You can visit [www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk), or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

[Piccadilly Gate](#)  
[Store St](#)  
[Manchester](#)  
[M1 2WD](#)

T: 0300 123 4234  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

© Crown copyright 2014

