

Sycamore Short Stay School

Old Farm Estate, Dudley, West Midlands DY1 3QE

Inspection dates

13–14 October 2016

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for pupils	Require improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Leaders and the management committee have not put in place an appropriate development plan that focuses on the most important areas for improvement.
- Leaders do not have an accurate understanding of the achievement of pupils because they do not have robust systems in place to collect and analyse pupils' progress.
- The pupil premium funding is not used well enough to ensure that disadvantaged pupils achieve well.
- Senior leaders do not make sure that all teachers apply the school's marking policy.
- Pupils make too little progress in reading and writing across the school.
- The length of the school day is too short for secondary pupils, which limits the time available to study some subjects.
- Pupils have too few opportunities for homework, which does not prepare them well enough for the next stage of their education.
- The quality of teaching requires improvement because not all pupils are challenged well enough and the use of teaching assistants varies in effectiveness.
- Primary pupils do not have the opportunity to go swimming with the school to help improve their safety in water.
- There are no after-school clubs or activities, which limits the range of the curriculum and reduces pupils' development of wider skills.
- Leaders have not ensured that they provide detailed and up-to-date information on the school's website.
- Pupils' behaviour is inconsistent.

The school has the following strengths

- The recently appointed headteacher is already securing clear improvements, working with a supportive management committee.
- The senior leadership team has raised expectations and increased the capacity for school improvement.
- Effective leadership of mathematics and the primary phase is helping to boost pupils' progress.
- The school's work to safeguard pupils is thorough and effective.
- Positive links with parents are leading to improved attendance by pupils.
- The progress made by pupils attending the alternative provision is good.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that self-review is informed by accurate and up-to-date information about pupils' progress
 - making sure that school leaders and the management committee focus on a manageable number of key priorities
 - developing the collection, evaluation and use of progress information to set pupils appropriately challenging targets and track progress, especially in the secondary phase
 - ensuring that the additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils is used effectively to boost their progress
 - making sure that teachers adhere to the school's marking policy
 - completing the recruitment of high-quality teachers
 - increasing the length of the school day to give increased time for teaching, particularly for key stage 3 pupils
 - making sure that the school's website meets statutory requirements by including information about the curriculum, child protection policy and behaviour.
- Improve pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare by:
 - providing consistent behaviour management to reduce the use of exclusions and the need for physical restraint
 - giving pupils more opportunities to develop the management of their own behaviour
 - developing strategies to reduce the use of inappropriate language by pupils
 - providing the opportunity for primary pupils to go swimming
 - introducing after-school activities and residential trips.
- Improve teaching and learning and thereby raise outcomes for pupils by:
 - ensuring that staff provide appropriate challenge to all pupils and deploy teaching assistants effectively
 - developing quality homework as a key entitlement for pupils
 - encouraging pupils to read for pleasure and developing their comprehension skills
 - providing opportunities for pupils to extend the quality and quantity of their writing.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium funding should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Self-review lacks precision because leaders do not have detailed assessment information about the achievement of pupils. Consequently, the school's development plan focuses on an unmanageable number of priorities, rather than the most pressing issues. The newly appointed headteacher has already begun to address this and has made some rapid improvements and raised aspirations in the drive for continual improvement.
- There is no system in place to measure the impact that the pupil premium funding has on the progress of disadvantaged pupils. It has focused primarily on developing pupils' emotional well-being and funding educational visits. As a result, pupils are becoming more resilient learners but they are not making as much academic progress as they should.
- Leaders do not ensure that teachers apply school policies consistently; for example, marking and behaviour management.
- Membership of the leadership team has been increased to add capacity but it is too early to judge the impact of this. Senior leaders are keen to be more involved in school improvement and are taking on increased responsibilities. Senior leaders demonstrated their ability, during the inspection, to provide professional and astute feedback to teachers following joint observations with inspectors.
- The effective leadership of mathematics and the primary phase is having a positive impact on improving teaching and outcomes for pupils. The leadership of other secondary subjects requires improvement. Staff are not provided with the information necessary to keep up to date with assessment and curriculum developments in the secondary phase.
- The school day is too short for secondary pupils and this limits the time available for them to study some subjects in depth. However, the curriculum complies with the latest guidance and prepares pupils well for their return to mainstream education. This is because secondary pupils now study separate subjects rather than completing topics.
- The physical education (PE) and sport funding for primary schools has been spent on indoor and outdoor equipment. This has helped to increase pupil engagement and develop their enjoyment of sport. However, the school does not offer swimming lessons as part of the PE curriculum and this reduces pupils' ability to improve their swimming skills or develop their awareness of water safety.
- Staff are aware of the vision for the future of the school and most feel well supported and enjoy working at the school. A minority of staff feel that behaviour management is not consistent.
- Staff are clear that they are being held to account for their responsibilities. Their performance is checked and training is provided to ensure that staff can meet the pupils' wide range of needs effectively.
- Leaders strongly promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development in lessons. These aspects are reinforced through appropriate displays around the school.

The headteacher has set high standards for how pupils learn and behave in school. Developing mutual respect and tolerance are central to the school's aims. This is helping to prepare pupils well for life in modern Britain.

- Most parents contacted during the inspection work well with the school. They feel that the headteacher and staff are very approachable. Parents also said that members of staff know their child very well, and this helps their child feel safe.
- The school's outreach service offers training to other schools, parents and pupils. Its work is designed to reduce exclusions and this is valued by local primary schools but is not as well received by secondary schools.
- The local authority has a clear understanding of strengths and areas for development and is aware of where it needs to offer more support and challenge. However, to date, its work has not had any direct impact.

Governance of the school

- The management committee has not ensured that the school's website meets requirements on the publication of specific information for parents.
- The management committee has not received enough information from leaders to help them guide school improvement sufficiently. However, members do have the skills and experience to provide appropriate support and challenge to the school's leadership team. Members are now asking more challenging questions and holding leaders better to account.
- Although members of the management committee know how the pupil premium funding is spent, they have not received enough information to determine the impact that this funding has on the achievement of disadvantaged pupils.
- The chair of the management committee has recently visited all classes to talk with staff and pupils about recent changes. Staff and pupils are positive about the way that the school is moving forward. The safeguarding member on the committee has contributed to updating policies and carefully monitors behaviour records.
- The management committee is fully aware of the link between teachers' performance and their pay. Effective systems are in place for the performance management of the headteacher.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- All policies are up to date and applied consistently in this caring school. Safer recruitment checks are carried out to ensure that adults are suitable to work with children prior to appointment. The designated safeguarding lead is very thorough and works well with other agencies, keeps detailed records and follows up any referrals made. Staff understand their responsibilities and are alert regarding any concerns about pupils' welfare. Staff are fully trained and are provided with ongoing safeguarding information. They know pupils very well and ensure that pupils know how to keep themselves safe, with particular regard to their vulnerabilities. Comprehensive risk assessments are completed to ensure that pupils are safe during visits in the locality. Pupils are confident that they are safe and well cared for.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The teaching team in the secondary phase is not fully established. There remains variability in teachers' confidence and the level of challenge provided for pupils. Consequently, teaching, learning and assessment require improvement in most subjects.
- Assessment, target setting and the tracking of pupils' progress are not effective. There is variability in the collection and use of information to direct support and interventions where needed. This directly impedes the progress pupils make as support is not provided soon enough.
- Sometimes, teaching assistant support is not used effectively by teachers. When used well, teaching assistants often provide a good balance of support and challenge to help boost pupils' progress. This happens, for example, when pupils are challenged to pronounce sounds correctly.
- Not all teachers apply the school's marking policy consistently. Some marking does not provide ongoing assessment of pupils' progress and this leads to pupils taking less pride in their work. However, some pupils' work is marked very thoroughly and ensures that pupils are aware of their progress and next steps in learning. Pupils are beginning to make comments about their own work and are developing the confidence to have a view on the work of other pupils in the class. This can be a challenge because many of the pupils are sensitive to any negative comments.
- Some of the most able pupils do not read challenging enough texts and are not encouraged to read for pleasure. Leaders are aware of this and, as a result, plans are in place to ensure that the new library offers pupils opportunities to extend their interest in reading and caters for different ability levels. The teaching of phonics ensures that pupils have the skills needed to tackle new words. Early readers can read accurately but are still developing their comprehension skills.
- Too few opportunities are provided to develop the quantity and quality of pupils' writing. Pupils often complete worksheets which do not require them to extend their writing or develop an ability to work independently.
- Pupils and staff are clear that unacceptable language in classes and around the school is still too evident. However, staff are beginning to tackle the use of derogatory language and make it clear that this is unacceptable. Pupils are given support to ensure that they are aware, for example, of the impact of any racist comments.
- Very little homework is provided by most teachers and this was raised as an issue by some parents. This lack of homework fails to give pupils equality with their mainstream peers. Also, it does not prepare them for the next stage of their education.
- The current secondary staff team has recently coped well with the change from teaching topics to separate subjects. They have appropriate subject knowledge and pupils are responding well to having a number of teachers rather than just one. They move between classes sensibly and can now access specialist equipment in subjects such as science.
- Mathematics is taught well. This is leading to rapid progress by secondary pupils. Expectations are made very clear and no learning time is lost as due importance is

placed on learning. Pupils appreciate the time given to answer challenging questions.

- Pupils are motivated by enthusiastic teaching in music and they are able to copy increasingly complex beats. They do not find this easy but cope well with their frustrations and are pleased with their success.
- Teaching in the primary phase has improved since the previous inspection. This is because of the confident and stable staff team who provide suitable levels of challenge to all pupils. In an art lesson, there was a 'buzz' to learning and pupils were absorbed in their work. As a result, pupils made good progress.
- Primary pupils enjoy carrying out investigations in science lessons and apply their knowledge in daily life. During an art lesson pupils were totally absorbed in the set task and were keen to show their high-quality work to the inspectors. The outdoor area is used effectively to develop pupils' ability to play together and stimulate learning.
- Most parents feel that they are kept well informed about their child's progress. However, some parents who spoke to inspectors felt they would like more information about the curriculum and more homework to support their child's learning. Inspectors agree that these are realistic expectations.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement.
- The wider curriculum is limited in terms of lack of swimming opportunities, inconsistent homework, and lack of after-school clubs and residential visits. These all restrict pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare.
- Staff are positive role models and pupils are confident that they can speak to a member of staff if they have any concerns. Pupils say they feel well looked after and are listened to. Many pupils feel that more clubs and activities should be provided in order to increase their opportunities to develop hobbies and interests.
- Pupils are welcomed effectively at the start of the day. This helps them to settle quickly. They are encouraged to talk with each other in their tutor groups and during breakfast time. Younger pupils respond well to the structure provided by the staff team.
- Records of behaviour incidents are thorough. Records checked show that there have been very few racist or bullying incidents this term. Those that do occur are managed effectively.
- Pupils have a growing awareness of how to keep safe.
- Pupils are encouraged to be active and have healthy diets. This is part of the planned curriculum.
- Staff have accessed, and understand, training to help keep pupils safe. This includes preventing radicalisation and extremism and promoting e-safety. Health and safety and risk assessment procedures are thorough.

- There are good links with other agencies to help meet pupils' complex range of needs. These links also make a major contribution in preparing pupils for the next stage of their education.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- Behaviour remains inconsistent and too few opportunities are provided for pupils to take responsibility for their own behaviour. This limits their personal development. Most pupils are clear that behaviour is not yet good enough and that, on occasion, pupils use inappropriate language.
- Most staff, pupils and visitors have noted the improvements in pupils' behaviour. The shared view is that the school is generally calm and pupils are engaged in their learning most of the time.
- There are occasions when pupils use their initiative; for example, secondary pupils independently put out tables and chairs at lunchtime. Also, younger pupils show that they can play together with minimal supervision.
- Pupils' attendance is recorded thoroughly. Overall attendance is improving and is higher than in previous years.
- Pupils look smart in their school uniform and hand in their mobiles to avoid distraction during the day. The no-smoking policy on school premises is effective. Pupils speak positively about the new reward system for good behaviour. One pupil said, 'I feel proud,' when discussing his behaviour. Other pupils said they enjoyed the reward trip to play football and the option to take part in additional art, selected by some of the girls.
- Staff and pupils are clear that the 'quiet rooms' are no longer needed as spaces for managing behaviour incidents. Instead, these rooms are used as valuable learning spaces.
- Few pupils now spend time out of lessons and their behaviour is managed by increasingly confident staff. Staff have been trained in physical restraint and incidents are carefully recorded. The focus on reducing the number of incidents that require physical restraint and the use of exclusions remains a priority. The headteacher is clear that every pupil should be offered a full-time placement.
- There is regular contact between the school and successful alternative provision. Reports confirm that pupils' attendance and behaviour at the alternative provision are good.
- Most parents have positive views about pupils' behaviour and attendance at school. This has led to improvements also being seen at home. Comments from parents include, 'I've never seen my child so happy at school,' and 'My child is now getting on well with other pupils.' However, a minority of parents and staff feel that behaviour is still an issue.

Outcomes for pupils

Require improvement

- Pupils' progress from their respective starting points requires improvement.
- Based on the limited information available, all pupil groups appear to make similar progress; for example, there is no variation in the progress rate between boys and the small number of girls.
- Leaders are unable to determine precisely the rates of progress made by different groups, including disadvantaged pupils and the most able. This is because of the lack of assessment information and analysis. However, work in pupils' books shows that both groups make expected rather than good progress.
- Progress in reading across the school is improving but is still too slow. Many pupils enter the school with weaknesses in reading. Most make good progress in terms of deciphering and sounding out new words but make too little progress in their comprehension skills. Also, there is too little challenge in some books, especially for the most able readers. This slows down pupils' progress and does not broaden their vocabulary.
- Pupils make expected rather than good progress in writing because they are not given opportunities to write at length or produce work independently and of good quality.
- Pupils enjoy practical work in science and are developing their research skills using computers. They use their mathematical skills well when sorting data and presenting their findings in a range of graphs. Pupils make good progress in mathematics but their progress in other subjects is variable.
- Primary pupils are making accelerated progress in the primary phase because of the stability and consistency of the primary staff team. Pupils' starting points are assessed and progress is carefully tracked in English and mathematics but not in other subjects. Pupils are making rapid progress in mathematics and use their knowledge well in this subject across the curriculum.
- Secondary pupils make rapid progress in mathematics. This was seen during lessons visited by inspectors and is confirmed by the standard of the work in their books. Pupils take pride in their work and learn from their mistakes.
- Recently introduced subjects such as art and music are enjoyed by secondary pupils but no systems are in place to measure progress. The hair and beauty and motor vehicle courses help raise pupils' confidence and prepare them well for studying key stage 4 courses. Enterprise lessons help pupils to develop teamwork and problem solving; for example, pupils work together to raise money for charities.
- Pupils who are placed in alternative provision attend the setting regularly and make good progress.

School details

Unique reference number	134768
Local authority	Dudley
Inspection number	10020036

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	5–15
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	34
Appropriate authority	The management committee
Chair	Michael Price
Headteacher	Steve Derham
Telephone number	01384 818 237
Website	www.shortstay.dudley.sch.uk
Email address	sderham@sycamore.dudley.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	11–12 November 2014

Information about this school

- The headteacher joined the school at the beginning of this term.
- The school is now on one site and offers support to mainstream schools with the aim of preventing pupil exclusions.
- There are significantly more boys than girls at the school and all have been permanently excluded from mainstream schools.
- The proportion of pupils entitled to pupil premium funded support is well above the national average.
- The school has additional primary PE and sports funding.
- A small number of pupils are educated in alternative provision at Rosewood Special School.
- No pupils have education, health and care plans and none are looked after by the local authority.

- The majority of pupils are of White British heritage.
- A separate assessment unit for pupils who are referred from the secondary fair access panel is based on the school site. Some of the pupils speak English as an additional language and may have access to the multicultural service that sits within this provision. The unit is independent of the school and did not form part of the inspection.
- The school does not meet requirements on the publication of information about the curriculum, child protection policy and behaviour on its website.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher and other senior leaders.
- Meetings were held with members of the management committee, a representative from the local authority and the school improvement partner.
- Inspectors spent time in lessons, including some joint observations with senior leaders.
- Inspectors scrutinised pupils' work in lessons and discussed their work with them.
- Conversations were held with pupils, and 13 responses to the Ofsted online questionnaires were taken into account. Pupils were observed at the start and end of the school day and during their breaks.
- Scrutiny of documentation included the school improvement plan, attendance information, safeguarding documents, behaviour and incident logs, pupil progress information, external review reports and minutes of meetings.
- An inspector telephoned the headteacher of the alternative provider used by the school.
- Responses from 14 Ofsted online questionnaires for staff were analysed.
- Inspectors met with parents and talked with some by telephone. A parental response to Ofsted was considered. There were too few responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, to generate any information charts.

Inspection team

David Smith, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Derek Barnes	Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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