

Sycamore Short Stay School

Old Farm Estate, Dudley, West Midlands DY1 3QE

Inspection dates

15–16 January 2019

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Committed leadership and decisive action by the headteacher have resulted in rapid improvement since the previous inspection. All staff are very supportive of the vision of the school.
- Leaders, including governors, have high ambitions for the pupils. They have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced and is supporting pupils' academic and social development well. Enrichment activities in key stages 1 and 2 are contributing well to pupils' learning.
- Teaching is good. Teachers and teaching assistants work well together to plan activities that meet pupils' needs effectively.
- Leaders are continuing to refine the assessment system. It is used well in English, mathematics and science to support teachers' planning. However, teachers do not use assessment as effectively in other subjects.
- Pupils' behaviour is good. Teachers apply behaviour management systems consistently and there is little disruption to learning. Pupils enjoy school and take pride in their work.
- Safeguarding is a strength of the school. All pupils say that they feel safe in school.
- Relationships between pupils and staff are strong, based on mutual respect. There is a strong team ethos in the school.
- Adults provide high-quality care for pupils. They use external providers well to support those pupils and their families in need of additional help.
- Pupils in key stage 3 do not have access to outdoor social and recreational space at breaktime and lunchtime. Consequently, they do not develop social skills as effectively as they might. Pupils in key stage 2 play outdoors on a well-equipped playground.
- Pupils' progress in English and mathematics is good. Pupils' progress in science is not as strong as it is in English and mathematics. The lack of specialist facilities for science in key stage 3 means that there is limited opportunity to do practical work.
- Most pupils successfully move to either mainstream or specialist schools appropriate to their needs.
- Attendance is well below the national average but is steadily improving. A minority of pupils do not attend regularly and are therefore not achieving as well as they could.
- Parents and carers are highly supportive of the school.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Work with parents to improve the attendance of pupils who continue to be regularly absent so that these pupils make better progress.
- Strengthen the impact of leadership by ensuring that:
 - assessment information is as well used in all subjects as it is in English, mathematics and science
 - the science curriculum at key stage 3 provides pupils with more opportunities for practical work.
- Improve pupils' personal development by ensuring that pupils in key stage 3 have better access to social and recreational spaces.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher has a clear and strong vision for the school. He is well supported by skilled, committed school leaders and an effective management board. As a result, leaders have established a positive and nurturing ethos for all members of the school community.
- Leaders have high expectations and are strongly committed to improve all aspects of the school's work. They know the school well and have prioritised key areas for improvement. They have addressed weaknesses successfully, and consequently the school has made rapid improvement over a short period of time.
- Leaders invest heavily in producing high-quality professional development and training for staff. As a result, middle leaders are effectively contributing to the school's improvement. Staff value these opportunities.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced. Leaders have designed a programme of study that addresses pupils' academic and pastoral needs. Recent additions to the curriculum include, for example, outdoor education, music, and personal, social and health education (PSHE). These additions are successfully developing pupils' confidence, engagement, self-regulation, emotional well-being and physical health.
- Leaders have introduced a system for monitoring the quality of teaching, learning and assessment that is supported by visits from a school improvement adviser. As a result, training is successfully directed to aspects of teaching that need to improve.
- Teachers use assessment information well in English, mathematics and science to support pupils' learning and target interventions to meet pupils' needs. Most pupils are making good progress in these subjects. However, teachers do not make as effective use of assessment information in other subjects.
- Additional funding, including the pupil premium and funding for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), is used well to support disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND. For example, residential trips, swimming in key stages 1 and 2 and trips to outdoor education centres have been offered to pupils. These activities are having a positive impact on pupils' attitudes to learning and, as a result, almost all pupils are fully engaged in their learning and want to achieve.
- Building relationships with parents has been a focus for leaders and is having a positive effect on pupils' attitudes to learning. One parent said of their child, 'He asked me: "Why can't the weekends be shorter, so I can go to school?"'

Governance of the school

- The management board is committed to the school. Its members have considerable experience in education, which contributes well to the overall development of the school. Board members:
 - work collaboratively with leaders to focus on improving outcomes by joining leaders in learning walks and looking at pupils' work

- pay close attention to their statutory duties, including safeguarding
- share good practice from their own schools, including, for example, the introduction of target sheets in books to track pupils' progress.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective in both the school and in alternative provision.
- Safeguarding is a strength of the school.
- Procedures are rigorous. The school's single central record is compliant and its contents are monitored regularly by leaders and the chair of the management board.
- Safeguarding is given high priority by all staff, who actively promote pupils' welfare. Leaders ensure that staff are kept well informed of pupils' needs and that appropriate training is up to date.
- Leaders and staff work extremely well with external providers to support pupils who are at risk or who are the subject of a multi-agency plan. Leaders are relentless in following up referrals made to children's social services or health service teams.
- Records related to child protection are detailed, well organised and stored securely.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Reading is a key focus for the school, with both individual and whole-school initiatives being introduced. Pupils read confidently and fluently. They are willing participants in reading lessons. As a result, pupils have made good progress with their reading and comprehension.
- Evidence of work in books shows that pupils across all key stages are developing their skills in extended writing well. Displays in classrooms and working walls are effectively supporting learning.
- Pupils with SEND are supported well in the school. Teachers and teaching assistants actively seek additional help from external providers, when needed, to support pupils' learning. For example, the educational psychologist regularly provides specialist advice and training to help with targeted interventions. As a result, pupils with SEND make good progress.
- The purposeful relationship between adults and pupils contributes well to the positive learning culture. Adults know the pupils in their class well and use behaviour management strategies successfully to keep pupils on task. Play is used well in key stages 1 and 2 to re-engage pupils so that little learning time is lost.
- Leaders have established an effective approach to assessment in English, mathematics and science that tracks pupils' progress and identifies where support is needed. Teachers and teaching assistants use this information well to plan activities that match pupils' academic, social and emotional needs. As a result, most pupils are making good progress in these subjects. However, leaders have not ensured that this type of assessment information is available in all subjects. As a result, teachers in other subjects cannot track pupils' progress and identify where additional support is needed

as readily. Regular external moderation gives validity to assessment information in English and mathematics.

- The recent appointment of a science teacher means that pupils in key stage 3 now have access to science teaching. As a result, most pupils are making good progress. However, the lack of a specialist teaching space for science means that pupils have limited opportunities to develop practical skills.
- Enrichment activities in key stages 1 and 2 support pupils' learning well. For example, pupils successfully use first-hand experience of the outdoors to develop their subject knowledge in geography.
- Leaders' use of an induction class for pupils when they first join the school means that pupils are appropriately placed in classes that will meet both their academic and social needs. Consequently, most pupils settle quickly into the school and start to develop good learning habits.
- Consistently applied classroom procedures and routines give structure to lessons and effectively support pupils' learning. For example, the use of target sheets in books shows pupils what they have achieved. This helps to improve their self-esteem and promote their engagement in learning.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. The same level of care is given to pupils in alternative provision.
- All pupils in the school and in alternative provision say that they feel safe in school. Pupils have a clear understanding of how to keep themselves safe, including when they are online and using social media.
- Pupils get on well with each other and there are very few reported incidents of bullying. Pupils are confident that any incidents would be dealt with and they feel that they have someone to talk to who they trust.
- Pupils take pride in their work and were eager to show it to inspectors. Presentation in books is of a high standard and shows that pupils are well motivated and keen to do well.
- Pupils respond well to the high expectations the school has of them. They treat each other with mutual respect and listen to each other's opinions. They say that the school meets their needs well and staff make time for them, and almost all pupils say that they would recommend the school to a friend. Pupils respond well to the rewards system, and this is helping them to develop into confident, articulate learners.
- Social times are used well to contribute towards the development of pupils' interpersonal and communication skills. These skills are transferred into the classroom and help pupils' learning. For example, in a PSHE lesson in key stage 3, pupils had a lively debate about the effects of drugs and alcohol on people's health. However, the lack of outdoor space for key stage 3 pupils limits the variety of activities on offer to them. Consequently, the chance to promote pupils' physical and emotional health in

key stage 3 is limited to a small number of indoor activities that may not appeal to all pupils.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good and a strength of the school. Given pupils' specific needs and starting points, their conduct and self-discipline are well developed.
- Pupils' movement around the school is orderly. Well-established routines reinforce leaders' expectations of pupils' good behaviour and ensure that the school is a calm learning environment.
- Low-level disruption to learning is rare. When it does occur, staff deal with it quickly and efficiently so that lost learning time is minimal. Staff focus on the de-escalation of incidents and building relationships. As a result, exclusions have reduced.
- Attendance remains well below the national average but is steadily improving. Case studies show that most pupils make marked improvement in their attendance from very low starting points. Leaders have effective procedures to monitor the attendance of pupils in school and in alternative provision. However, the small group of pupils who are regularly missing school are not achieving as well as they might.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils join the school with low starting points as they have been unsuccessful in their mainstream schools. Some pupils have poor attendance, and many have special educational needs and/or disabilities that have not been identified. While at school, most pupils make good progress in developing literacy and numeracy skills through a range of subjects. However, those who regularly miss school do not do as well. Assessment information shows that the longer a pupil is at the school, the better their progress is.
- In key stages 1 and 2, most pupils make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. In key stage 3, most pupils make good progress in English and science and even more make good progress in mathematics.
- The continued focus on the teaching of reading is a strength of the school. Pupils in both key stages are making very good progress in reading and comprehension.
- Pupils with SEND make good progress. Leaders ensure that they receive appropriate support to meet their needs. While at the school, many are successful in their application for an education, health and care plan. However, pupils who need a specialist school do not always access this in a timely manner.
- Pupils are well prepared for the next stage in their education. During their time in school they are helped to develop the necessary behaviours and attitudes they need to succeed. Most pupils successfully move to mainstream or specialist schools as appropriate to their needs.

School details

Unique reference number	134768
Local authority	Dudley
Inspection number	10058474

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 to 14
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	27
Appropriate authority	Local authority
Chair	Peter Best
Headteacher	Steve Derham
Telephone number	01384 818237
Website	www.sycamore.dudley.sch.uk
Email address	sderham@sycamore.dudley.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	13–14 October 2016

Information about this school

- Sycamore Short Stay school is a small school that offers full-time provision for pupils who have been permanently excluded from their mainstream school.
- There are more boys than girls in the school.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage.
- A small number of pupils are educated in alternative provision at Rosewood Special School.
- A small number of pupils are looked after by the local authority.
- The headteacher joined the school in September 2016. The deputy headteacher joined the school in June 2018 in an acting role.
- An assessment unit for pupils referred from the fair access panel is based on the same site. The unit is independent of the school and was not part of the inspection.

Information about this inspection

- Meetings were held with the headteacher, acting deputy headteacher, other leaders, a representative from the local authority and the school improvement adviser. Inspectors analysed the 26 responses to Ofsted's online staff survey.
- The lead inspector spoke to the chair and vice-chair of the management board.
- Short visits, with senior leaders, were made to a wide range of lessons. The team inspector also visited the alternative provider used by the school.
- Inspectors spoke to pupils informally and observed behaviour in lessons, during tutorial time and social time. The lead inspector considered the nine responses to Ofsted's online pupil survey.
- There were insufficient responses to Parent View for an analysis of results to be available. However, the lead inspector considered the two free-text responses submitted during the inspection and spoke to two parents during the inspection.
- Various school documents were scrutinised, including the school's self-evaluation, the school development plan and information about pupils' progress, behaviour and attendance. Documents relating to safeguarding were checked.

Inspection team

Lesley Yates, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Paul Elliott

Ofsted Inspector

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