



Inspection report

Southern Cross School

**Better
education
and care**

Unique Reference Number 105623
LEA Manchester

Inspection number 273476
Inspection dates 24 and 25 January 2005
Reporting inspector Mr E Craven HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996 and was deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act.

Type of School	Special	School address	Barlow Hall Road
School category	Community		Manchester
Age range of pupils	11 to 16 years		M21 7JJ
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	0161 881 2695
Number on roll	41	Fax number	0161 861 7190
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr A Weinberg
Date of previous inspection	June 2003	Headteacher	Mr J Law

Age group	Published	Reference no.
11 to 16 years	2 March 2005	273476

Introduction

When Southern Cross School was inspected in June 2003, it was judged to require special measures because it was failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education. Her Majesty's Inspectors of schools (HMI) subsequently visited the school on three occasions to monitor its progress, and reinspected the school in January 2005.

Description of the school

Southern Cross is a school providing for up to 45 pupils with emotional, social and behavioural difficulties (ESBD), all of whom come from the central and southern parts of Manchester. At the time of the inspection, there were 41 pupils on roll including two female pupils. Each of the pupils has a Statement of Special Educational Need. Eighty three per cent of the pupils are entitled to free school meals and there are no pupils for whom English is an additional language. The school operates on two sites; the Key Stage 3 pupils and a few Key Stage 4 pupils are based at the main site, while the remainder of the Key Stage 4 pupils are based at the Millennium Powerhouse, a community facility, approximately five miles away. The school has been part of a federation of three special schools in Manchester providing for pupils with similar emotional, social and behavioural needs since February 2004.

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Overall effectiveness of the school

In accordance with section 14 of the School Inspections Act 1996, I am of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures, since it is now providing an acceptable standard of education for its pupils.

Southern Cross School has made good strides in eliminating the weaknesses identified at its June 2003 inspection. At the outset, the school wisely identified that the pupils' attitudes and behaviour needed to improve significantly before teaching and learning could effectively take place. Behaviour management arrangements, including personal targets and reward systems, are good and the pupils' attitudes and behaviour have improved markedly. The recently appointed headteacher has a determination to raise standards and has focused staff on school improvement. Teaching has subsequently improved and is at least satisfactory, and about half is good. The rate of progress the pupils make has increased. The curriculum is suitably broad and balanced and meets statutory requirements. The atmosphere in the school is friendly and positive and one where learning is valued. Alterations to the accommodation at the Millennium Powerhouse site have resulted in temporary classroom arrangements and this, together with transport problems, has reduced the effectiveness of the provision.

Improvement since the last inspection

The inspection of June 2003 required the school to address key issues concerned with the teaching of English; behaviour management; the pupils' attitudes and behaviour; the curriculum; and leadership and management. There has been satisfactory progress in leadership and management, and good progress elsewhere.

Capacity to improve

The school has created a positive climate for change and its capacity for further improvement is sound. School improvement, and notably teaching and learning, is a focus of the work of staff, who are receptive and keen for the school to develop further. The use of data to monitor the pupils' attitudes and behaviour and the rate of the pupils' academic progress have improved. There are useful examples of the school analysing its performance and focusing on identified weaknesses. The headteacher and senior managers have observed lessons and monitored planning on a regular basis. The effectiveness of subject co-ordinators is uneven. The work of the federation has begun to assist the school and shows much promise.

What the school should do to improve further

The school's development plan recognises the areas where improvement is needed. However, the key priorities are to:

- continue to raise standards across the school;
- urgently improve the pupils' attendance;
- strengthen, where necessary, the effectiveness of senior and middle managers.

Achievement and standards

The standards achieved by the pupils are generally below those expected from pupils of a similar age. This is due to their problematic educational histories and in some cases their special educational needs. However, a few pupils do display abilities in some subjects which are close to those expected nationally. Standards are rising: there has been an increase in the number of pupils being entered for national tests at the end of Key Stage 3 and for external examinations at the end of Key Stage 4. The results achieved in these tests and examinations improved in 2004 in comparison to the previous year. Some other pupils achieved externally recognised qualifications, such as Entry Level and Unit Award Scheme certificates in English, mathematics, science, information and communication technology and design and technology.

Personal development

The pupils' behaviour and attitudes have improved significantly and are good overall. This contrasts sharply with the finding of the 2003 inspection where the pupils' attitudes and behaviour were poor. Over the past two terms the staff have worked hard to promote positive behaviour and attitudes among the pupils. There were no lessons where they were less than satisfactory and they were good or better in two thirds. The pupils concentrate more carefully in lessons and many have realised that they can achieve. There have been examples of pupils making determined efforts to get to school despite transport difficulties and very poor weather; this is reflective of them enjoying school and of their improved desire to learn. The staff show care and respect and most of the pupils reciprocate. They are well supervised at all times and the relationships between the staff and pupils are good. Weekly whole-school targets for improved social skills have complemented the pupils' individual behaviour targets, and both have contributed to the development of a positive ethos.

The provision for the pupils' social and moral development is good. Assemblies are used well to help the pupils understand how they can improve their behaviour and their learning. Social occasions, including breakfast club and break-time at the main site, provide helpful opportunities for the pupils to enhance their social skills. There are suitable plans for some older pupils to undertake a basic counselling course so they might offer support to others. The provision for the pupils' spiritual and cultural development is satisfactory. Displays around the school, some of which promote cultural learning, are attractive and informative. However, visits in the locality are not used sufficiently to enhance the pupils' learning.

The incidents of exclusion have reduced considerably; 46 days were lost to exclusion in the autumn term 2004 compared with 101 days in the autumn term 2003. Attendance is unsatisfactory; the rate for the autumn term 2004 was 65.7 per cent in comparison to 73.5 per cent for the summer term, and 67.2 per cent for the whole of the last school year. It is particularly poor at the Millennium Powerhouse site. However, the school is exploring a range of strategies to improve the situation although some factors are beyond its immediate control, for example transport arrangements.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall; it was at least satisfactory in all the lessons and sometimes good. The staff have worked hard to develop effective behaviour management techniques and this has resulted in a much improved climate for teaching and learning. In the best lessons, teachers had a good knowledge of their subject, classroom management was strong and the pupils were encouraged to take an active part in learning. The overall profile of teaching has improved significantly when compared with 2003.

The lessons were well planned, prepared and organised, and the intended learning outcomes were shared with the pupils from the start. Teachers' questioning was effective and the pupils were encouraged to take part in the lesson rather than sit passively. There was a sensible balance between teacher exposition and the time provided for the pupils to engage in tasks and activities. The teachers work in close harmony with the support staff who are directed appropriately and make a valuable contribution to the pupils' learning.

The school has begun to analyse performance data to judge its own effectiveness and new arrangements for recording data have been established. The school has introduced target setting in all subjects, but this process is still in its infancy and is not firmly embedded in practice.

The curriculum is broad and balanced, and based on national requirements. The curriculum was criticised in 2003, but improved timetabling arrangements, more specialist teaching and improved resources have resulted in a coherent and balanced diet of work for the pupils. However, sporadic attendance by a few pupils significantly fragments their continuity in learning. At Key Stage 3, literacy across the curriculum is appropriately highlighted as a means of furthering the pupils' underdeveloped language skills. Through the use of alternative curriculum arrangements, increased opportunities are now provided for Key Stage 4 pupils. There is a good range of the pupils' work displayed around the school exemplifying their achievements in different subjects. The provision for special educational needs is good, particularly in relation to improving the pupils' behavioural and attitudinal needs. Individual learning plans have been established and these are regularly reviewed and amended.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of the school are satisfactory overall. The headteacher was appointed in September 2004 and he has quickly gained the respect of staff and pupils alike. He has ensured that the improvement in the behaviour and attitudes of the pupils has been sustained, and he has successfully focused the staff on improving the quality of teaching and learning. He has a sound view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Despite the challenging circumstances the school faces, staff morale is high.

Both senior and middle managers are committed to the school's improvement agenda. However, they vary in their effectiveness to lead developments for which they are responsible. The headteacher has appropriately identified the need to restructure the senior management team to enable him to broaden his strategic overview. The school has begun to construct a new school improvement plan to make clear its future direction.

The governing body is responsible for all three schools in the federation and was formally constituted in October 2004. The governors have an accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They are being ably supported by the principal of the federation in establishing sound practices to hold the school to account. Although the federation is barely a year old it has been instrumental, through the secondment of a behaviour support manager to Southern Cross, in improving the attitudes and behaviour of the pupils. The school is far less isolated now than was the case previously and the federation is facilitating valuable opportunities for training, the sharing of good practice and more flexible responses in meeting the needs of the pupils.

The local education authority (LEA) has provided good support for the school; the link adviser has been pivotal in co-ordinating the support of the LEA's consultants as well as providing valuable training, guidance and support for staff and the senior managers.

Appendix – Information about the inspection

Southern Cross School was inspected under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996 by a Registered Inspector and a team of inspectors in June 2003. The inspection was critical of many aspects of the work of the school and, in accordance with that Act, the school was made subject to special measures because it was failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education.

The school was visited by HMI in February, May and September 2004 to assess the progress it was making to implement its action plan and address the key issues in the inspection report of June 2003.

In January 2005, two HMI returned to inspect the school for two days. The inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996, which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools the authority to cause any school to be inspected. The inspection was also deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act.

Twelve lessons and a breakfast club were inspected. The pupils' conduct was observed around the school and at break and lunchtimes, and samples of their work were inspected. Discussions were held with the headteacher, the acting deputy headteacher, the English co-ordinator, the principal of the federation, the chair of governors, a representative of the LEA, and informally with other staff. A wide range of the school's documentation was scrutinised. Account was taken of the evidence from previous monitoring inspections.

The inspection assessed the quality of education provided and the progress the school has made, in particular in relation to the main findings and key issues in the inspection report of June 2003 and the action plan prepared by the governing body to address those key issues.

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