



The Compass

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 134373
LEA Dorset
Inspection number 282572
Inspection dates 8 May 2006 to 9 May 2006
Reporting inspector Charles Hackett AI

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

Type of school	Special	School address	48 Lynch Lane
School category	Pupil referral unit		Weymouth
Age range of pupils	4 to 16		Dorset DT4 9DN
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01305 206530
Number on roll	111	Fax number	01305 206531
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr Peter Gregson
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable	Headteacher	Mr Allan Wood

Age group 4 to 16	Inspection dates 8 May 2006 - 9 May 2006	Inspection number 282572
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The Compass (PRU) provides education for students from ages 4 to 16. However, in reality very few students of primary age are referred to the Centre. A few students are admitted because they have been excluded from mainstream education but the majority of students are still on the roll of mainstream schools and are admitted for short periods because they are at risk of being excluded or for medical reasons. A few students have previously refused to attend a school (school phobics). Students' levels of ability when they enter the Centre vary although, because of missing educational opportunities previously, their standards are usually below the national average. The Centre has one main unit but makes use of another 14 different sites to provide education for its students. Its main site is on the third floor of a former office building and contains four teaching bases and two administration areas. There are no rooms for specialist teaching. The Centre moved to this site in the Autumn term of last year on a temporary basis as there are plans for it to move to more suitable premises in the near future. The Compass is part of the Chesil Education Partnership, which comprises the 28 mainstream and special schools within the area.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The Compass Centre's effectiveness is good, with some outstanding features. The most noticeable of these is the attention and flexibility shown to meet the needs of each individual child. Because of this, the Centre is having a positive impact on the lives of students and meeting its own aim to 'help all our learners achieve their full potential in life and work'. Students very much enjoy being in the Centre and appreciate the fact that staff listen to their views. Good progress in academic and personal development enables many to return to mainstream school and become effective learners. Students in Years 10 and 11 who remain with the Centre pass examinations such as GCSEs and successfully engage in work-related learning, including work experience placements. Records of the destinations of last year's leavers show the positive impact the Centre has had on their lives.

The key drawback, however, to the Centre's work is the unsatisfactory quality of the current premises. They limit the curriculum offered and this means it currently does not meet the needs of students in Year 9 and below and some students with statements of special needs. Space is also limited for one-to-one counselling and the storage of teaching resources. The latter impacts on the teaching strategies used which, while good overall, at times involve students too much in completing worksheets, which is not always effective in encouraging learning.

The leadership and management of the PRU are good. Leadership is visionary in the way in which it seeks to work with other schools and other agencies to meet the needs of students. The Centre has evaluated its effectiveness and its positive view matches that of the inspection team. Although the Centre has a good focus on improving students' achievements, its improvement plan lacks sufficient detail to show how and when proposed developments will be implemented. The Centre provides good value for money and has the capacity to improve further, particularly when the move to new premises occurs.

What the school should do to improve further

Focus its efforts on:

- working with the local authority to improve the quality of premises as soon as possible
- ensuring that the curriculum meets the needs of all students and the quality of teaching is consistently good through an increased use of different resources to meet students' different learning styles
- developing the school improvement plan further to show more detail as to how and when improvements will be implemented.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

The achievement of students is good. Although the majority of students enter the Centre with little interest in learning, evidence shows that the majority achieve well in a suitable range of subjects. This good progress includes those students who are

still on the roll of mainstream education and who, following their time at the Centre, successfully return to mainstream. Those students who stay to Year 11 take external examinations and achieve good results, including GCSE successes in up to five different subjects.

Students make particularly good progress in their speaking and listening skills, which is evident in the way they grow in confidence and willingly and skilfully engage in discussions. The fact that so many students leave to take up employment or enter further education is also evidence that the Centre is effective in enabling students to achieve.

The extent of students' achievements in practical subjects and the arts is adversely affected by the limitations of the buildings used for teaching. Appropriately, because of its frequent change in population, the Centre does not set whole-unit targets for improvement; however, there are regular individual targets set for students and evidence suggests these are achieved well.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students' personal development, including their spiritual, moral and cultural development, is good. The Centre is particularly effective at increasing students' self-belief and tackling their 'emotional health'. Students themselves report how much they enjoy and feel safe at the Centre. That it is 'more relaxed and less stressful' is typical of the comments students make about being at the Centre.

Attendance rates are currently only satisfactory, having fallen away recently. The Centre feels this is as a result of the change of premises which has resulted in many students having to make their own way to the Centre rather than have taxis provided. The Centre, although not having a formal school council, takes account of the views of students, who feel a strong part of the whole community. As one student said, 'sometimes I think the kids are running this place' when referring to the way staff listen to the views of students and seek to act upon their suggestions.

Students have a good understanding of the benefits of a healthy lifestyle, including the dangers of drugs and alcohol abuse. They also see the benefit of involvement in physical exercise and between them take part in a wide range of different sports. Students' economic well-being is well supported by the work in mathematics, the work-related curriculum and work experience placements.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers have strong expectations for students to be able to achieve. Their good relationships and good behaviour management skills ensure that students remain fully involved in lessons. Teaching is

focused on students' abilities because teachers make use of the assessments made of students when they first arrive at the Centre. A key strength is the way teachers try to pick up on students' interests and build up learning opportunities around these. For example, students showing an interest in motor mechanics are encouraged to 'read for purpose' articles covering this topic. A project on fossils completed by one pupil, previously not prepared to engage in learning, is an excellent example of such an approach being very effective.

Weaknesses in the premises, however, have an impact on the quality of teaching and learning. For example, the very limited storage space available for resources constrains the variety of teaching approaches used and can result in students too often having to complete worksheets. Additionally, because teachers share rooms it is difficult to personalise the rooms as teaching bases for specific subjects. Despite these limitations, there are imaginative approaches taken to engage students who are reluctant learners. These include making fruit salads using exotic fruits as part of a PSHE session looking at healthy eating and very successfully engaging a student in a game of squash to encourage speaking and listening skills.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory. Despite the best efforts of staff, it is difficult for it to be of a higher standard than this because of the inadequacies of the current premises. For example, the limited number of rooms available affects what can be taught on site, particularly practical activities. These weaknesses mean that full-time students in Year 9 and below and those with statements of special needs are not being taught all that they should be.

The Centre seeks to extend the learning opportunities available and asks students what they would like to study, and does everything it can to meet these requests. A Centre-devised NVQ land-based course, which involves students engaging in farming activities such as dry stone wall building and managing and looking after sheep, is an example of the Centre's efforts to provide courses that challenge and interest students. Personal, social and health education (PSHE) is a strong aspect of the curriculum. The programme ensures that students cover a good range of topics. For example, a 'difference and diversity' course gives pupils a very good understanding of different cultures and beliefs within society. Good residential experiences are another positive feature of the curriculum.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support provided for students are all good. Staff are committed to ensuring that all students are given as much support as possible. This starts from when students are first admitted through an excellent induction programme. Following this, personal education plans are set up. This involves students having their own individual timetables. Further support is provided through effective mentoring. Students have a staff mentor who is available to offer advice with regard to school and outside

issues. However, guidance in relation to the quality of students' work is inconsistent. Whilst there are examples of helpful comments in students' workbooks, some other pieces of work are not marked or just ticked and this is not helpful to students in improving their work.

Good systems, including risk assessments and child protection procedures, are in place to ensure that students are safe. An outstanding feature is the very effective links the Centre has with its Partnership schools. Evidence from the local authority shows the work of the Compass Centre is impacting on other schools in reducing permanent exclusions. Good links have been established with other agencies such as the Youth Offending Team and Connexions, and all of these are used to provide students with as much support as possible.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The leadership and management of the Centre are good. The headteacher has had a very positive impact on the development of the Centre's effectiveness. Together with the head of service responsible for children out of school, they have developed a staff team determined to meet the needs of all students. The clear vision for the role that the Compass Centre can play is driving through improvements that not only improve the Centre's effectiveness but also have a positive impact on partnership schools.

Good systems exist to monitor the quality of education, and good self-evaluation processes show that the Centre is constantly seeking to analyse its effectiveness. The Centre improvement plan has a really strong emphasis on improving student outcomes in relation to their academic and personal development. However, it lacks the detail needed to show how these improvements will be implemented and what money is available to ensure that they can be achieved.

Good support is provided for the many staff attached to the Centre, although the Centre itself has recognised that at times, staff working in the different premises off-site may feel isolated from the main body of the Centre. Plans are in place to improve this through regular newsletters to staff. Minutes of the management committee meetings show that they monitor the effectiveness of the Centre on a regular basis.

Given the many strengths of the Centre, there is clear evidence that it is providing good value for money and has the capacity to improve even further.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	NA	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	NA

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	NA
The behaviour of learners	2	NA
The attendance of learners	3	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	1	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	NA

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	NA

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	2	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Dear Students

Thank you for making both myself and Ms. Mascall so welcome in your Centre. We enjoyed meeting you all. Following the visit, I have written a report and your parents and carers will receive a copy.

Important comments in the report include:

- you very much enjoy being at the Centre and are making good progress in your academic and personal development
- the staff care a lot about your well-being and work very hard to offer you as much support as possible
- Staff listen carefully to your views, which means you are fully involved in the activities of the school community
- teaching is good and is enabling many of you to do well back in your mainstream schools or to stay and pass examinations
- the Centre plays an important part in supporting all the schools in the Chesil partnership to help students with behaviour difficulties.

However, to make your Centre even better, we think, and your headteacher agrees with us, some improvements need to be made. The most important of these are:

- the local authority, who act as the governors of the Centre, providing premises that will improve the range of subjects you can take and the quality of teaching even more
- developing the school improvement plan further to show more detail as to how and when improvements will be implemented.

Once again thank you for being so helpful and polite.

Charles Hackett (Lead inspector)