

Sherborne Learning Centre

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	130315
Local Authority	Dorset
Inspection number	315612
Inspection date	5 December 2007
Reporting inspector	Sarah Mascall

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	6-16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	47
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Headteacher	Ian Hedley
Date of previous school inspection	26 April 2004
School address	Simons Road Sherborne DT9 4DN
Telephone number	01935 814582
Fax number	01935 814582

Age group	6-16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

The Sherborne Learning Centre is one of five centres within the Children Out of School Service (COOSS) for Dorset Local Authority. It caters for all types of students, including those who have been excluded or are at risk of exclusion from school, school refusers and those with health issues. The majority of students are in Years 10 and 11; only about a fifth of the student population are in Years 1 to 9. The number of students with a statement of special educational needs varies over the year. At the time of the inspection there were a small number of these students on the centre's roll. There are a small number of students in public care. The vast majority of students are from White British backgrounds and there are no students with English as an additional language. The centre has achieved Healthy School status.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The Sherborne Learning Centre provides a good education for its students. It is very successful in reintegrating students in Years 1 to 9 back into mainstream schooling. It has achieved this partly through building extremely good relationships with local schools, but also through the excellent links it has established with a range of agencies which ensure that staff are able to care for students and support their welfare very effectively. As a result, students make outstanding progress in many aspects of their personal development. The most important of these are the improvements in their behaviour and their very positive approach to learning. Many feel valued in the centre and willingly acknowledge the fact that they like being treated as adults. Because of this they respond positively and are keen to do well. Students' recognition of the changes that the centre has brought about in them is reflected in their parents' very positive views. Many comment on the very good relationships and support of staff and how much their children have changed for the better since starting at the centre.

The vast majority of students improve their attendance because they like the centre. This has a positive impact on their achievements, enabling them to make good academic progress. The centre has high expectations for its Year 10 and 11 students and sets itself challenging whole-centre targets. As a result, all students gain at least one GCSE and leave with accreditation in mathematics and English. Many achieve the grades predicted by their mainstream school, catching up with the skills and knowledge they have missed through extended absences. The vast majority of younger students make sufficient progress to enable them to successfully return to their mainstream settings. The reintegration of students is supported well by the centre's good curriculum, which is well focused on ensuring that students have the opportunity to study the same subjects as they would in a mainstream school. A vocational curriculum is being established and opportunities to gain accreditation in building skills and other courses are valued by the students. The good subject knowledge of teachers, their understanding of students' special needs and their patient explanations enable students to achieve well. The centre has recently started to improve assessment procedures. Students' knowledge and understanding are now assessed when they start at the centre, but this information is not yet used to set well-focused targets that enable teachers and students to be clear about what steps need to be taken to bring about improvements in students' learning.

The centre has developed greatly over the last three years and much of this is a result of the headteacher's high expectations for the students. Staff share his commitment to provide the students with the skills they need to cope in the world of work. The centre has made good progress since the last inspection and has addressed the issues raised. This is because the headteacher provides a clear direction for the centre. However, at times, changes are brought about through informal processes. This is because, although there is considerable monitoring of provision, the information gathered is not always analysed and used to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the centre. Formal improvement planning is not well established. As a result, the centre does not always have a realistic understanding of its strengths and weaknesses and is overly positive about its effectiveness.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve assessment processes so that teachers have a better understanding of the next steps for learning and set well-focused targets to enable students to achieve these.

- Make better use of the information gathered through monitoring to ensure that the centre has a clearer understanding of its strengths and weaknesses and plans more effectively to bring about improvements.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students make good progress in their learning and achieve well. This is despite the fact that standards are generally below those expected nationally because many have missed a lot of time in education before joining the centre. For those in Years 10 and 11, progress is often very good. In 2007 nearly half of the students gained GCSEs at grade C or above and a fifth achieved five or more GCSEs. The centre concentrates on ensuring that all students gain GCSEs in mathematics. Nearly all students achieved passes in English GCSE. Those who joined the centre late or who had low literacy levels gained passes in entry level accreditation.

The centre judges the progress made by students in Years 1 to 9 in terms of successfully reintegrating them back in to mainstream. It aims to achieve this in one to two terms, and in the vast majority of cases it is successful. It is, though, in the process of looking at other ways to measure the progress of students while they attend the centre. For students with a statement of special educational needs, progress is good and they benefit from a curriculum that supports their needs effectively. All other students, including the very small number in public care, make the same progress as their peers.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The change from disliking school to enjoying attending the centre is very marked and students comment on the fact that they know now that they can gain GCSEs and have a better chance of going to college and getting a job. As a result, they are well prepared for the world of work when they leave the centre. They are very positive about the relationships they have with staff and the fact that they feel they are respected as individuals. Many participate in the range of the activities provided by the centre and have a good understanding of staying healthy. They know which foods and drinks are good for them but do not always put this into practice. Many, though, are developing a very good understanding of how to keep safe. This was reflected particularly well by one student who talked openly about the support he is getting to give up drugs. Students listened to him with respect and were very supportive. Behaviour overall is very good. Whilst students take time to adjust to the centre's expectations, many adapt and respond well, recognising what is and what is not appropriate behaviour. Great importance is placed on students' views and they are involved in making decisions regarding the centre. There is also a representative of the students on the management committee. Many students contribute to the community and one student talked about how she helps in an old people's home, talking to the residents and taking them for walks.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers and staff quickly establish effective relationships with the students and use every opportunity to praise them. This does much to develop students' confidence and self-esteem and encourages them to participate in lessons. A range of activities in lessons and a focus on

making work interesting capture students' attention and many will settle quickly to work. The setting of individual work is developing and where it is effective, students work hard for the whole lesson. This was evident in an English lesson, where students were given different beginnings of a ghost story matched to their ability. This good practice is not yet consistent across the centre because assessment procedures are still developing. As a result, there is not always sufficient awareness of what each student needs to do to progress to the next stage of learning. The marking of work is very variable and even where it is detailed, such as in English, it does not often provide students with suggestions of how they can improve their work further.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum enables students to study a broad range of activities. Younger students are prepared well for returning to mainstream while older students can gain accreditation in a number of subjects. The centre is working hard to extend opportunities for vocational qualifications and has already established a building skills programme which includes rural studies. A good start has been made to providing students with taster courses at a college that, although in a different local authority, is the closest one to the centre. Each student has an individual timetable and many get well over the recommended minimum amount of taught time. However, the centre recognises that the allocation of time is not secure enough for it to be confident that all students, especially those with a statement of special educational needs and those who are permanently excluded, have the opportunity of 25 hours of taught time each week.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The high level of care provided for students is a strength of the centre. Multi-agency workers are encouraged by staff to drop in to the centre whenever they need to. Students become comfortable with their presence and are less likely, as a result, to reject the help and support provided. The very good relationships with parents further support the care of students. Parents appreciate the regular communication with staff, not only about when there are problems but also about the positive things that have occurred. Procedures for child protection and the vetting of staff are robust and ensure students are safe.

The support for students' academic progress is not as secure as other aspects of care and guidance. Individual education plans are in place but the targets are too broad. They are not sufficiently well focused on enabling students to make specific steps in their learning so that teachers have a clear understanding of the progress they are making and can track how well they are achieving.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher has taken effective action to improve provision, ensuring that students gain a range of accreditation, and has established very good links with local schools. Systems for monitoring the work of the centre are effective and where weaknesses are identified swift action is taken. This is evident in the improvements in mathematics since last year, when GCSE results were not as good as expected. Quick and effective action resulted in improvements this

year, with all students gaining passes in GCSEs. However, the lack of a formal leadership structure within the centre means that too much responsibility for change has been left to the headteacher and, as a result, he has not had enough time to formalise the strategic aspects of the centre and ensure that the strengths and weaknesses are clearly identified. The local authority has recognised this and is looking to improve the management structure within the centre. The headteacher recognises that although the centre's successes are rigorously monitored, they are not yet measured effectively enough for interested parties, such as the management committee and parents, to have a clear understanding of the centre's educational direction. The Friends management committee provides a good level of support to the centre and is keen to be more involved in supporting the centre's self-evaluation process. Both this group and the full management committee have a good representation from different agencies and this supports links with students well. The many strengths of the centre mean it is well placed to develop further.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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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
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

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

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

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

6 December 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Sherborne Learning Centre, Sherborne, Dorset DT9 4DN

Thank you very much for your time when I visited you recently. I enjoyed talking to you and was very impressed by your positive approach to having a visitor in your midst. I agree with many of you who think Sherborne is a good centre.

You told me how much you enjoyed going to the centre and how much harder you work. It was good to hear how positive you are about going to college and finding work. Many of you achieve well and gain passes in GCSEs. You benefit from good teaching and your teachers are very good at explaining things to you. It would help you more though if teachers' assessments of your work were better so that you know what you have to do next to improve. I have asked them to do this and set you targets so that you are clear about what you have to do.

The centre's systems for making sure you are looked after are very effective and staff have extremely good links with other agencies who can help you. You are able to study a good range of subjects and the centre is working hard to make sure you can attend a nearby college. The new building skills project will enable you to gain accreditation in vocational courses as well.

The centre is well led and there have been a lot of improvements in the last three years. I have, though, asked the headteacher to make better use of the information he has gathered about the centre. This will ensure that there is a better understanding of what the centre is good at and what it needs to do, so that improvements can be planned more effectively.

Thank you again for your help and I wish you well for the future. I hope you will continue to support the centre in its work and help bring about improvements.

Yours sincerely

Sarah Mascall (Lead inspector)