

The Primrose Centre

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	135253
Local Authority	Sandwell
Inspection number	319622
Inspection date	18 June 2008
Reporting inspector	Michael Megee

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	7-11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	21
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Karen Deakin
Headteacher	Catherine Bentley
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Holly Lane West Midlands Smethwick B66 1QN
Telephone number	01215 584023
Fax number	01215 658701

Age group	7-11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

The Primrose Centre was opened in September 2007 and provides education for pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties who have been permanently excluded from mainstream schools in Sandwell. Many of the current pupils transferred from the previous provision based in a primary school. There are six times as many boys as girls.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The Primrose Centre provides its pupils with a satisfactory education. In the short time it has been open, the centre has gained the confidence and trust of the pupils and their parents, and has turned around the lives of many of the pupils and their families. One parent said of her son, 'He kept running away from school. It's been a complete turnaround. His work and his behaviour are now excellent.'

The headteacher, through her determination and hard work, has ensured a calm and efficient move into the new building. There has been the minimum of disruption for the pupils who have already experienced a difficult and fragmented education in the past, resulting in below average standards. Not all the management systems are fully in place, but sound teaching and personal care and support have brought about satisfactory personal and academic achievement.

Classroom staff enjoy good relationships with the pupils. Teachers plan lessons methodically but do not always vary the level of challenge in teaching, such as in the tasks they set or when using questions in whole class sessions, to ensure that all pupils' needs are met effectively. Stronger teaching in numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) has led to greater achievement in these areas. Progress in literacy has been less rapid because of the lack of a subject coordinator and relatively less strong subject knowledge among the teaching staff. The centre has prepared many of the pupils to return to mainstream schools, although this return is often not as swift as planned, because there are too few staff available to support the pupils through the transitional period.

The staff are caring and supportive of the pupils, and this has greatly assisted the pupils in their personal development so that they quickly regain a positive view of learning. They experience a satisfactory curriculum based around themes and activities which they find interesting and enjoyable, and consequently they begin to attend regularly and their behaviour improves. Achievement is held back somewhat by weaknesses in academic guidance, particularly in the way that individual targets are used. Pupils have individual targets, but these are often too vague, not always incorporated into lessons and pupils are often unaware of what their targets are.

Satisfactory leadership and management have guided the centre through this first difficult period. It is to the headteacher's great credit that she has achieved this without the support of an effective management committee or from a full-time senior leadership team. This sound start in the face of difficulties demonstrates that the centre has the potential to continue to go from strength to strength.

What the school should do to improve further

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- Ensure that there is always a close match between teaching activities and the needs and capabilities of the pupils.
- Ensure that all teachers have a thorough knowledge of teaching literacy and are well supported by the specialist coordinator.
- Ensure that all pupils are aware of their own specific individual achievement targets, which are emphasised by staff through the school day.
- Together with the local authority (LA), ensure there are sufficient staff to enable pupils to return to mainstream education as quickly as possible.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Pupils join the centre at different ages and at all times of the year with standards that are below the national average. This is because their emotional and behavioural difficulties have led to fragmented learning and sometimes quite significant gaps in their education. Nevertheless, the centre staff quickly get pupils ready to learn and they all make satisfactory progress. As a result, the centre manages to eventually return most of its pupils to mainstream schools. Pupils' progress is faster in numeracy and ICT because teachers have good specialist subject knowledge and background in these areas. Their progress is less strong in literacy because the teachers lack all the required specialist knowledge. The centre has recently appointed a literacy coordinator to promote the subject more effectively. Pupils' progress in meeting their individual targets, although satisfactory, is held back because teachers do not always emphasise the targets sufficiently in lessons. In addition, pupils do not always know what their targets are. There is no discernible difference between the achievement of girls and boys.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

In almost all cases, pupils settle down quickly at the centre and their behaviour improves. Overall, it is good. As one pupil put it, 'Since I started at this school, I'm nowhere near as naughty as I was before. I'm getting better and the teachers help me a lot.' There is relatively little bullying, and pupils say that teachers deal effectively with any bullying incidents. Because of this and the extra vigilance afforded by the small numbers of pupils at the centre, pupils feel safe and untroubled.

Pupils say that they enjoy the lessons, especially the gardening, and they attend satisfactorily. Parents agree that their children love coming to school. One parent said, 'My daughter prefers to be here than at home. At the weekend, she says, "I wish I was going to school today" '. Pupils have a sound understanding of how to act safely, and know what constitutes a healthy diet, although they do not always choose healthy options. Pupils have an increasing range of opportunities to take responsibility around the centre, and the centre staff plan to widen this range next year. Parents say that they like the wide age range in the classes because it teaches the older pupils to look out for the younger ones. Pupils make their feelings known as individuals through the pupil counsellor and in circle time. As yet, there is no pupil council through which the centre can hear their views as a group.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory, although cultural development is less strong and pupils have not yet developed a clear understanding of life in multi-cultural Britain. Pupils are being soundly prepared for the future by their satisfactory achievement of basic skills, and by successfully returning to mainstream education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Pupils and staff get on very well together and teachers deal calmly and effectively with any difficult behaviour. This is a great asset and helps sound, and often good, learning to take place. Pupils speak affectionately about the staff, and there is genuine respect on both sides. As one pupil said, 'The teachers here are brilliant. Our teacher tries his hardest to do his best for us.' With the small numbers of pupils in classes, staff very quickly get to know individual pupils well. When planning lessons, however, teachers do not always make full use of all available assessment information to ensure a close match between the activities offered and the differing needs of the pupils. The centre has very recently acquired a good range of ICT equipment, but teachers have yet to make full use of this in teaching.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The centre builds its curriculum around particular school-wide themes such as the ambitious gardening and ecology project that is currently underway. Pupils are very excited by this approach. When asked what they like doing most, they all say 'Gardening!' and when asked about their most interesting educational visit, they all say, 'The allotments!' They particularly enjoy the practical aspects of the topic such as designing flowerbeds, as well as the digging and planting.

The centre does not yet monitor the balance of subjects within a theme to make sure that the pupils are not doing too much or too little of each subject. The centre also runs a programme to assist pupils in making the transition back into mainstream education. Presently, the aim is to return pupils within 26 weeks. This is proving very difficult and pupils are staying much longer. This is mainly because the centre does not have sufficient staff to support pupils when they attend potential mainstream schools to ensure success. The centre is beginning to enrich its curriculum through a variety of lunchtime activities and through therapeutic activities such as child yoga.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The centre has all the appropriate measures in place to ensure that pupils are safeguarded and feel valued. Centre staff provide strong personal support for the pupils so that self-esteem is restored quickly and pupils get back on track with their learning. The centre does much to form a strong partnership between home and school, and with other agencies such as social services. Parents and pupils say how much the school cares for the pupils as individuals and how much they trust all the adults who work in it. One parent said, 'Teachers always find the time to help out parents if there's a problem. They ring you up, and give you advice about how to get your child to improve.'

Academic guidance is less strong. Pupils have targets that indicate what they need to work on next to improve their performance. However, these targets are often too vague and many pupils do not have a secure understanding of what their targets are or how they should use them.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Parents are confident that the headteacher has made a sound start and will maintain the centre's strengths and move it on. They feel she is really on their side. One parent said, 'The head's brilliant. She will pop round to your house, and she's very down to earth. She doesn't mince her words so that problems are always nipped in the bud.' During the short time that the centre has been open, the headteacher has certainly worked hard to ensure that the school is calm and orderly, and that pupils are making steady personal and academic progress. Some things are not yet in place, due to circumstances beyond the centre's control. A management committee has only just been formed so it is not yet providing the centre with sufficient guidance, support or challenge. There is not yet sufficient staffing to enable the centre to meet its aims of returning pupils quickly to mainstream education. The deputy headteacher is only on the site for two days a week, making it difficult for the leadership team to forge ahead quickly. The headteacher knows what needs to be improved, and how to make the necessary changes. For example, she recognises that she does not yet have a really sharp analysis of how provision contributes to the outcomes in pupils' progress. She plans to work on this during the next few months when she has a full year's information on which to draw. Based on its present areas of strength and the way in which it has tackled the setting up of a new centre and the lower achievement in literacy, the school has the necessary capacity to improve.

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Annex A

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?	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

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

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?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
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	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	4
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

19 June 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of The Primrose Centre, Smethwick, B66 1QN

It was very good to see you at the centre recently. A big thanks to those who came and talked to me, and told me all about the exciting projects you are undertaking. The eco-park sounds like a great idea!

You clearly like the centre and the staff very much. These are a few things I found out about the centre myself.

- The centre gives you a sound education.
- You make satisfactory progress in your studies as well as in the way you are growing up.
- Your behaviour is very much better than it was when you were at school.
- Your teachers work hard and do a satisfactory job.
- You have a reasonable range of subjects to study.
- You enjoy the things that the teachers ask you to do.
- The staff care about you and give you satisfactory support.
- The headteacher has made a sound start in running the centre.

I have asked the centre to do four things to make life even better.

- Make sure that teachers always give each of you activities that challenge you in lessons.
- Make sure that all the teachers are up to date in how to teach reading and writing.
- Make sure you have 'SMART' targets, and that you know what they are. (Ask your teachers to explain what 'SMART' stands for).
- Make sure that there are enough people around to help you get back to mainstream schools as quickly as possible.

Perhaps you could help by doing your best to remember your targets and by continuing to behave well.

With every good wish for the future,

Yours sincerely

Mick Megee Lead inspector