

Wimborne Learning Centre

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	131827
Local Authority	Dorset
Inspection number	328648
Inspection date	1 October 2008
Reporting inspector	Sarah Mascal

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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	50
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Headteacher	Kim Rickford
Date of previous school inspection	22 November 2005
School address	School Lane Wimborne BH21 1HQ
Telephone number	01202 886947
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Age group	11–16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Wimborne Learning Centre is a small pupil referral unit which educates students who have been, or are at risk of being, excluded from their mainstream or special schools. Many stay on the roll of their mainstream school whilst attending the centre part time, having experienced behavioural problems in their mainstream settings. At present, there are only a very small number of permanently excluded students. Nearly a third of students are referred because of medical reasons and a very small number of pupils have statements of special educational need.

The centre rarely takes pupils of primary school age. At the time of the inspection a very small number of pupils in Year 6 had just joined the centre. Because of the very short time these pupils had been in the centre it was not possible to make judgements about their progress.

Many of the students have spent long periods out of school prior to joining the centre, and as a result standards on entry are well below average.

There are plans in place to move the centre to a new site in January 2009.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Strong leadership has enabled the centre to develop very quickly in a short space of time and the centre now provides a good education for its students. The headteacher, since taking up her post two and a half years ago, has raised expectations for students' achievements. The quality of teaching has improved and is now good and this has led to much improved outcomes for the students, particularly in passing GCSEs. The progress made by students is good and many achieve, and in some cases exceed, their predicted grades in GCSEs. Achievement in art is outstanding. Students progress more quickly in mathematics, science and information and communication technology (ICT) than they do in English. Action is already being taken to improve resources and teaching strategies to enhance progress in English. The centre recognises that literacy is not yet taught sufficiently well in other subjects to support the skills that students learn in English lessons.

Parents are very positive about the impact of the centre in enabling their children to turn their lives around. They praise the commitment of staff and as one commented, 'They never give up on a child.' Parents like the fact that they and their children are involved in decision making and there is considerable consultation about what the centre can do to help each student. One typical comment was, 'The centre has done wonders for my son. Staff are very flexible and cater for each child's individual needs.' This is very evident in the good quality curriculum, which, despite the poor accommodation, provides a wide range of activities that engage students' interest. Because of this, and their own involvement in decision making, students clearly like attending the centre and improve their attendance from their previous settings. They participate well in many of the activities provided and are working hard to adapt their lifestyles to more healthy living. There are good systems in place to ensure that the environment is safe and students' care and welfare is a high priority. Behaviour is much improved in the centre and there are very few incidents of poor behaviour. The very good links with other agencies supports students and their families well.

Very effective leadership has brought about considerable change and, as a result, the centre is highly valued by the schools it serves. Centre staff are being empowered to take on responsibility for their subjects and are developing a better understanding of how to bring about change. The self-evaluation process is effective and providing staff with a clear focus of what needs to be done to bring about improvements. Whilst improvements have been drawn together into a centre development plan, this document does not fully reflect all the areas that have been identified for improvement. This limits the effectiveness of the plan as a means of communicating clearly to all those involved with the centre the priorities for change. There is good monitoring of many aspects of the centre's provision but this is not always sufficiently clearly linked to areas identified for improvement.

Good leadership and management, together with the high expectations staff have for students, ensure that the centre is very well placed to continue to make good progress.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve teaching and learning strategies and curriculum opportunities so that students are able to develop their literacy skills in different subjects.
- Establish a detailed development plan that reflects the areas identified for improvements and ensure that monitoring is clearly linked to all areas identified for improvement.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards are broadly average by the time students leave the centre. This reflects students' good achievement and the good progress that all students make from their greatly varying starting points. For a few students, progress is outstanding and they achieve well above their predicted grades in GCSEs. The high quality artwork exhibited around the centre reflects students' achievements in art and design, with many of them gaining A to C grades in their examinations. Students make faster progress in mathematics, science and ICT than they do in English, because there are not enough learning opportunities for students to reinforce their literacy skills across the curriculum. About a third of students make good progress in English, whereas over two thirds of students make good or better progress in mathematics, science and ICT. Students in Years 7, 8 and 9 achieve well particularly in ICT where over one third of students make excellent gains in their learning.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The attendance of the vast majority of students is good and this reflects their very positive approach to the centre and learning and their good level of enjoyment. At times though they are not always good in getting to the centre on time but this is improving. Students say they like the way they are treated as adults and they clearly value the positive relationships with staff. Although occasionally they take time to settle in lessons, they are keen to work and there is a positive ethos in all lessons. Students behave well and show good awareness of each other's needs. Whilst many students are not confident speakers they are keen to be involved in discussions, listening well to each other and responding sensibly, for example when talking about alcohol abuse. They show a good understanding of healthy lifestyles through such discussions, particularly in talking about the damage alcohol can do. There is a high take-up of the good range of sporting activities, and opportunities to learn to cook are valued.

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students is good. Students have a strong sense of what is right and wrong. They value the centre's rules and are particularly keen on the rewards system. One Year 11 student, for example, asked at the end of a lesson if he had earned a postcard home that would tell his family how hard he had worked. Students have a strong sense of community and have worked well with the local community. This has heightened local people's awareness about the centre and its role. Several students have led assemblies at a local primary school about bullying and breaking down barriers within the community. Whilst progress in English is not as rapid as in other subjects, students are generally well prepared for life when they leave the centre. This is reflected in the high numbers that successfully return to mainstream schools or go on to college and work after Year 11.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Staff are very effective in establishing good relationships with the students. As a result, lessons are calm and there are high expectations for learning. Behaviour is managed very well through the use of humour and reasoned conversation. There are a number of strengths that are typical in much of the teaching. Teachers' planning ensures that students build on their skills well.

Where planning is particularly effective, such as in mathematics, there is a focus on each individual student and ensuring that support staff are very clear about their role.

Very secure subject knowledge is used well to make lessons interesting and develop students' knowledge and understanding. Students are confident to ask questions, such as in a science lesson about why people are left or right handed. There is a good focus on making lessons practical in many subjects, and so holding students' attention. In analysing why students are not making as rapid progress in English as they are in other subjects, subject staff are reviewing the way they teach to try to capture students' attention more effectively and develop resources further. Whilst all centre staff use subject specific vocabulary in their lessons, opportunities are missed to promote new words through visual means such as displaying key words around the classes, and opportunities for students to write at length are limited.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum provides an effective balance of subjects and activities that enable students to have a good range of experiences. There is a particularly good focus on ensuring that the curriculum supports students' individual needs. Staff show considerable flexibility in planning for each student and individual timetables are changed where necessary if it is felt a student is not making the progress he/she should. The good opportunities to attend colleges and experience the world of work, together with the very wide range of accreditation, does much to prepare students well for returning to mainstream schools or for life when they leave school. The close working relationship with mainstream staff means that students are well supported and induction back into school is handled well and sensitively. Poor accommodation restricts learning opportunities on site, especially in technology, although facilities within the community are used very well to help overcome the limitations of the accommodation. The centre is aware that there are insufficient learning opportunities across the curriculum to reinforce students' literacy skills.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The care and welfare of students are given a high priority. Staff establish very good links with students' families and there is a high level of consultation when students start and throughout their stay to ensure that their needs are met. The centre is currently reviewing its procedures to ensure that all staff have clearer formal guidance about the needs of new entrants. Child protection procedures are robust, as are those for safeguarding students. Risk assessments for activities out of the centre are securely in place. The very good links with other agencies are used extremely well and ensure students' health and well-being are well supported.

Assessment of students' progress is good, with regular reviews with tutors and termly reports sent home to parents and carers. Students' work is marked regularly and in some subjects such as English there is good guidance about how the student could improve his/her work further; this though is not yet consistent in all subjects. Each student has an individual education plan and these are in the process of being developed further so that the plans incorporate clear academic targets as well as social and behavioural targets.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The clarity of vision of the headteacher, with the support of her staff, has brought about considerable change. The headteacher quickly identified what needed to be done when she started, and many of the areas for improvement have been addressed, leading to the good progress now being made by students. The centre recognises the need though to establish a detailed development plan that outlines the key areas for improvement to enable the management committee and other interested parties to have a clearer view of progress in all aspects of provision. It also recognises the need to ensure that monitoring procedures are clearly linked to all areas identified for improvement. The management committee already benefits from detailed reports about the centre's activities. It has set targets for students' behaviour and attendance and has been very specific in monitoring provision for looked after children. As yet though it does not set targets for the centre that would enable it to judge its effectiveness in terms of students' academic progress. Links with the community, particularly local schools, are very strong. This has contributed greatly to the success of the centre and its role within the community.

Subject leaders are extending their roles and, appropriately, the centre is planning to introduce action plans that will enable subject leaders to have a clearer understanding of the impact of their improvements. Staff are developing their skills in analysing the data concerning students' achievements. This is very evident in English where the lead teacher has already identified ways of improving the quality of teaching and the curriculum.

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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?	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?	2
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/or disabilities make progress	2

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	2
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 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

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	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

2 October 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Wimborne Learning Centre, Wimborne BH21 1HQ

Thank you for making me so welcome during the inspection. I enjoyed the opportunity to talk to you during the day. You were right in being very positive in your comments about the centre, as were your parents and carers. This is because the centre is providing you with a good education. As a result you are making good progress in your learning and achieving well. It is good to see how many of you return to mainstream or go on to college. Here are some of the most important bits of the inspection report that I thought you might like to know about.

- You achieve particularly well in mathematics, science and ICT; in art your progress is outstanding.
- You have a wide range of opportunities to study different subjects and many of you gain good passes in your GCSEs and other courses.
- The centre places a lot of importance on your well-being and looks after you well. It does this by working closely with your families and multi-agencies to help you.
- Many of you are working hard to stay healthy and eat well, and you show a good understanding of the damage such things as alcohol can do to your body.
- Your teachers have a very good knowledge of their subjects and work well with you in lessons.
- The centre is very well run by the headteacher and she is well supported by her staff.

In order to make the centre even better we have asked staff to do the following.

- Improve your opportunities to develop your literacy skills through the work you do in all subjects, not just in English lessons.
- Develop a plan that shows how the centre wants to improve, and show more clearly how this will be checked, so that everyone can see the progress it is making.

I wish you well for the future and hope you can continue to improve your achievements even further.

Yours sincerely

Sarah J Mascal Lead inspector