

New Leaf Centre

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	134523
Local Authority	Walsall
Inspection number	328918
Inspection date	14 January 2009
Reporting inspector	Charles Hackett

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	14–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	42
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Headteacher	Karen Caswell
Date of previous school inspection	24 January 2006
School address	EDC Pelsall Lane Rushall Walsall WS4 1NG
Telephone number	01922 686330
Fax number	01922 686349

Age group	14–16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

New Leaf Centre takes three types of admissions: students who have been permanently excluded from a mainstream school, students who have been previously missing from education and students on the roll of a mainstream school but at risk of permanent exclusion. Many students are admitted full time but remain on the roll of their mainstream school. The majority of students have a history of disrupted education. Not all students attend the actual centre. Many are provided with alternative curriculum placements with external providers. These are arranged and monitored by project workers attached to the centre. After a period of instability in leadership, the present acting headteacher took up her post in June 2008.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

New Leaf Centre is a satisfactory PRU. Its strengths include the way it impacts positively on students' personal development and well-being, and the good curricular flexibility shown in its efforts to re-engage students in learning. Students make good progress in improving their behaviour and develop key social skills valuable for their future well-being when they reach school leaving age. 'Ever since I've been at the centre I've definitely grown up and become more mature' was how one student summed up how he felt he had improved. Other students clearly state they enjoy being at the PRU, preferring it to mainstream school. Many students improve their attendance from their previous settings, however, attendance overall at the PRU is unsatisfactory. A minority of students do not attend often enough and as a consequence not all students achieve well enough.

The PRU is innovative in striving to provide interesting and challenging activities. The project workers have ensured there are very good links with a wide range of alternative providers. These are well used to motivate students and encourage them to become involved in learning. For example, students who enjoy the practical nature of a course entitled 'DJ sound engineering' link their activities to work designed to improve their basic literacy and numeracy skills. Staffing difficulties mean there is no science specialist teaching and this limits students' opportunities to study and achieve in this subject.

Most students join the PRU with standards that are below average. Their achievement is satisfactory. This is significant as achievement for most was very limited before joining the PRU. Their opportunities to gain external accreditation have been increased and this has resulted in the number of external examination passes doubling in the last two years. In the last year these included, for the first time, passes in a range of vocational courses. Limited information on students' ability and previous achievements means that it is difficult for the PRU to precisely track students' progress in their work. However, a new data collection programme has been set up with the intention of using this to ensure that the PRU can record and monitor student achievement.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. The positive relationships staff have with students encourage them to stay on task and complete work. Lessons are well planned in relation to resources and what it is expected students will learn, but insufficient attention is given to match work to the individual abilities of each student. Support and guidance for academic achievement is satisfactory. Some assessment of students' abilities is undertaken but the school development plan rightly identifies as a priority the need to extend this further. The headteacher recognises that information gained from this will then assist staff in setting work that will challenge students to achieve their maximum potential.

Support and guidance for students' personal development is good. Tutor sessions, regular monitoring meetings and learning mentor support play important roles in this, as well as the positive links that exist with other agencies, such as Connexions and Youth Offending Officers. This support is much appreciated by parents, one expressing a typical view in the comment, 'I think the centre has done a brilliant job.'

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Good monitoring systems have been put in place, including rigorous quality assurance checks on the work of outside providers. Self-evaluation of the PRU's work is strong and leading to improvements. Together with the management committee, the acting headteacher is very clear about how the PRU can develop and be even

more effective. Her input into the development plan, together with the improvements since the previous inspection show there is good capacity for the PRU to improve further. The management committee, though, is small in numbers and relies heavily on the support of its very committed chair.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve assessment processes used to gain a clear understanding of students' abilities and knowledge and track their rates of progress.
- Use information gained from assessment to ensure work set is sufficiently challenging.
- Take effective action to improve the attendance of all students.
- Provide opportunities for students to study and achieve in science.

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

Most students make at least satisfactory progress whilst being at the PRU. Students usually work hard in lessons to complete their work and achieve the learning objectives. Increasing success in passing external examinations is a positive feature, although lack of rigour in tracking progress means that it is difficult for the PRU to know what level of achievement these successes represent for each student. Students achieve well in a number of activities with training providers. For example, one group of eight students created and performed musical pieces to the public at a local shopping centre. Positive achievement is also demonstrated by good transition rates for students when they leave the PRU. For example, the fact that 87% of last year's leavers moved into education, training or employment compares very favourably with the figures for all school leavers within the local authority.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. This results in students' improved behaviour and increased confidence in their ability. Behaviour in and around the PRU is good and students value the centre's rewards system. Students respond well to staff and appreciate the support they are given. 'I feel better about myself here', explained one student. Students know they are listened to by staff. Those who are members of the 'student voice' have made a number of positive contributions to the PRU community, such as campaigning for a bike shelter for the use of both staff and students. Students comment on how much they enjoy attending the PRU and many have improved their attendance since starting there. There are though a small number of students who, despite staff's best efforts, are resistant to schooling and who are not, because of their poor attendance, achieving as well as they should. Students feel safe on site and when on off-site activities, because of good risk assessment processes. They are developing a good understanding of healthy lifestyles through regular opportunities to take part in physical activities and encouragement to eat healthily.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Lessons are well structured and usually engage students in learning because of the interesting activities planned. For example, in mathematics, students enjoy the practical task of using string to estimate and demonstrate the length of their intestine. Innovative approaches are used to keep students alert, such as in food technology, where a timer is set for every 10 minutes to signal the need for a student to ask a relevant question about the task they are completing. Classrooms are positive learning environments and good displays are evident throughout the site. Assessment information is not always used well to ensure that work is well matched to the individual needs of students and as a result, irrespective of their ability, all students are often set the same work. Lesson observation records show that support staff are not always used effectively but this is now being addressed.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The manner in which the PRU has extended its curriculum to address the varying needs and interests of students is impressive. Right from the initial stages of joining the PRU, students know they can try a range of courses. Project leaders negotiate individual packages, including, when necessary, giving students the chance to try different activities. Very good quality assurance processes ensure that the work of each outside provider is carefully linked to the needs of each student. Other curriculum opportunities available within and outside the centre are appropriate, including those made to support part-time students to complete their GCSE courses. Efforts are being made to recruit a science teacher to remedy the present gap in the curriculum.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Verbal support for students in completing their work is very positive. This has recently been extended to include useful written comments, but without sufficient tracking of progress there is no guarantee that all students can be challenged enough to ensure that they achieve as much as possible. Good individual support is given for personal development and students' progress is monitored well through regular one-to-one meetings and monthly reviews. A clear reward system is used well to challenge students to behave appropriately. The PRU intends to introduce pastoral support plans so that this can be developed further.

Good procedures are in place to ensure students are safe. Staff are checked appropriately for their suitability to work with students, and training in key aspects, such as in child protection issues, is undertaken by all staff.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

After a period of changing leadership, the acting headteacher has brought clear stability to the management of the PRU. She has helped develop a strong staff team that has a commitment

to do the best it can for each student. A real strength is the partnership that has been developed with other schools and agencies, which has established the PRU as an important part of the local authority provision. The PRU is well established within the community, with students enjoying the benefits through work-experience placements and the use of local leisure facilities.

A good development plan based on an accurate evaluation of the PRU's effectiveness has been developed and is in the process of being introduced. The development plan is clearly written, although the management committee is frustrated that it is not in a position to ensure that funding available in the budget can be matched to each development priority.

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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	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?	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/or disabilities make progress	3

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	3
The attendance of learners	4
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?	3
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?	3

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	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	3
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
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	3
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

15 January 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of New Leaf Centre, Walsall, WS4 1NG

Thank you for making me so welcome when I visited you recently. I really enjoyed my visit to the centre.

I have written a report which judges the centre to be satisfactory. The strengths include your good personal development and the flexible individual programmes arranged for you. The headteacher is making sure the centre develops well and is keen to ensure you all achieve well. All the staff relate well to you and good links have been established with outside providers and other agencies. The classrooms are positive learning environments and help give you good opportunities to achieve and enjoy being at the centre.

If the centre is to be even more effective there are some of you who need to improve your attendance. In addition, better systems are needed to assess what you already know and can do. This should help teachers set you challenging targets to ensure you achieve to your maximum. Finally, there is a need to provide you with a science teacher.

I hope you continue your efforts and all of you are successful in moving onto further education, training or employment when the time comes for you to leave.

Best wishes

Charles Hackett Lead inspector