

Sycamore Centre KS3 PRU

Inspection report - amended

Unique Reference Number	134768
Local Authority	Dudley
Inspection number	328978
Inspection date	14 January 2009
Reporting inspector	Kathleen Smith HMI

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	11–14
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	13
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Headteacher	Sue Kulas
Date of previous school inspection	15 March 2006
School address	Sycamore Green Old Farm Estate Dudley DY1 2QE
Telephone number	01384 818237
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Age group	11–14
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Amended Report Addendum

Report updated to resolve formatting inconsistency

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors.

Description of the school

The Sycamore Centre KS3 PRU is a pupil referral unit (PRU), which provides for students in Years 7–9 who are permanently excluded from school. All have social, emotional and behavioural difficulties with prolonged attendance issues. At the time of inspection, there were four boys and one girl in Year 8, and seven boys and one girl in Year 9. Four are from minority ethnic backgrounds and approximately a half of all students are entitled to free school meals. Most permanently excluded students attend during the morning session and depart after lunch. The centre also provides a shared provision programme, which caters for all secondary schools across the Dudley borough. Up to eight students at risk of permanent exclusion from these schools attend the centre in the afternoons on programmes of learning lasting six weeks.

The centre moved site in September 2006 and was previously known as Meadow Road PRU. Dudley Council is in the planning stages of reorganising PRU provision within the borough.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The centre provides a good standard of education for students who are permanently excluded or at risk of exclusion from school. The teacher in charge and staff team provide a safe and secure learning environment which successfully re-engages students in learning. Their behaviour improves and most successfully return to mainstream schools. Students make good academic progress and attend more regularly than before. They achieve extremely well in the various sporting and creative projects they are involved in and gain in confidence and self-esteem. However, this progress is not reflected well enough in the centre's formal tracking nor in the setting and recording of targets for students to achieve.

Teaching and learning are good and teaching is well planned, based on the thorough baseline assessments students take on entry to the centre. Individual needs and academic levels of ability are successfully identified and extra support is provided where needed. Students' behaviour is well managed by staff and most fully participate in lessons and remain on task. Students are actively involved in community-based activities and projects, which enhances their personal development. The curriculum provides a wide range of opportunities for students to gain in confidence.

Care, support and guidance are good. Students settle quickly and good and supportive relationships are quickly formed between staff and students. Parents are very positive about the support they receive from the staff at the centre and the progress their young people make. Students are given high levels of support to return to mainstream schools and most are successful at sustaining their placements. Safeguarding procedures conform to current guidance and students feel safe and secure.

Leadership and management are good. Staff work very effectively as a team to ensure students' needs are met. The centre has made enormous strides in improving provision since the last inspection and has a very good understanding of what it needs to do to improve further. Its capacity to improve is good. However, the centre's targets for improvement are not always effectively recorded in its improvement plan. The management committee has only recently formed and does not yet provide sufficient critical support. The centre is well resourced and provides good value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the consistency of the quality of the process of setting targets and recording of achievements to identify more clearly the progress students make in their education and behaviour.
- Extend the role of the management committee in providing critical support to the centre to ensure standards are maintained.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Staff assess students immediately they start at the centre to identify their ability levels. Most students start with standards well below national expectations and have very negative experiences of education at their previous schools. Despite this, the centre works hard to re-engage students in learning and most make good academic progress. Progress in English is particularly good and well tracked. Progress in mathematics and science, the other core subjects,

is secure. High standards of work are achieved in creative and practical subjects and students gain in confidence and self-esteem through their success in sport, art, drama, dance and music. Students' social skills and behaviour improve considerably, which enables the majority to return successfully to mainstream schools. Students are mostly given tasks that are very challenging to complete, especially where these require them to behave responsibly and cooperatively with staff and other students. However, learning and behaviour targets set for students to achieve do not always reflect the good progress students are making. Often they are too general for progress to be measured well enough or for accurate recording of achievements to be done.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students' behaviour is good. They develop a clear understanding of what is acceptable behaviour within the centre and wider community. Through good behaviour management by staff, students learn to control and manage their anger. They feel safe and incidents of bullying are low. Students greatly enjoy the new and exciting opportunities afforded to them, many involving working with external community groups and providers. These include boxing with a qualified coach at a local gym and dance performances to public audiences in prestigious local and national theatres. There is a strong focus on improving students' awareness of healthy eating and exercise. Students enthusiastically participate in sporting and outdoor pursuits. They eat healthy breakfasts, and have fruit and water available at break times. Issues that may affect their lives outside the centre including crime and drug and substance misuse are discussed with the local community police officer who visits regularly. Students are often involved in charitable events and fund raising and make a worthwhile contribution to the local community. Students' views are sought about the centre's provision. Most students' attendance improves whilst at the centre and is good overall.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good. Initial assessment information informs planning for learning and takes full account of the needs of a very diverse group of students with very different levels of ability. High levels of support are provided for those students with additional learning needs. Students show most enthusiasm when involved in practical work and when taking part in creative and physical activities most suited to their interests and capabilities. They are encouraged to work cooperatively with others in the group. Most students understand and are able to articulate what is required of them during lessons, not only in relation to the work they have to complete but also in relation to their behaviour. Students respond well to the calm and patient approach shown by teachers and teaching assistants. This ensures that most remain on task and are fully engaged in learning. However, on a few occasions during lessons, students are over directed and guided too much in the completion of their work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum provides a good range of subjects that meets the needs and interests of all students, and has a strong impact in preparing pupils well for the future. The curriculum is under continuous review and the centre has recently mapped the activities it offers to ensure

that it recognises and evaluates how successful it is and how well students achieve in relation to the Every Child Matters outcomes. Activities are geared to individual needs and personalised programmes are developed for students with their particular needs and interests in mind. For example, horse riding is arranged for a student who is not interested in the other sporting activities on offer. The wide variety of creative and enrichment activities such as dancing, music, drama and art are very popular with students. The centre actively seeks new initiatives for students to be involved in, such as the recycling and maintenance of bicycles project, arranged in co-operation with the probation service. There are good links across curriculum activities and information and communication technology (ICT) is integrated across all curriculum areas. There are limited opportunities for students to undertake food technology due to lack of resources and suitable accommodation.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support are good. Students are assigned to a tutorial group which enables them to settle quickly on arrival each day. Staff know the students' needs well and trusting relationships are quickly formed based on mutual respect. This provides students with the safe and secure learning environment in which students with little motivation learn best. Though the targets in students' individual plans can lack clarity, day-to-day guidance from teachers is good because of the depth of knowledge they have. The centre has very good links with parents and a range of professional services. An experienced teacher has a specific responsibility to help reintegrate students back into mainstream schools. She works closely with the school and the student to ensure their transition back into mainstream provision is as smooth as possible. Attendance and behaviour are closely monitored. The behaviour reward system provides students with incentives to improve their behaviour and is successful at motivating students to succeed. Safeguarding procedures are sound and implemented effectively. However, not all risk assessments for individual students contain sufficient information to ensure the correct actions are taken to minimise risks. Although in receipt of careers guidance, there are limited links with the Connexions service to provide expert external advice on future education and career choices for students in Year 9.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The teacher in charge successfully leads her team to create a supportive environment clearly focused on improving the life chances of students who lack motivation and enthusiasm for learning. Morale amongst the staff team is high. They are appreciative of the support they receive from the teacher in charge and the good opportunities they have to further their own training and development. There are good systems in place to ensure the quality of provision. In particular, feedback given to teachers after lesson observations on how to improve their performance has been successful in raising standards in teaching and learning. The formal monitoring and tracking of student progress has improved but is not yet fully effective. The use of learning and behaviour targets for students to achieve is underdeveloped.

Equality of opportunity is promoted effectively throughout the centre and discrimination is tackled appropriately. The centre promotes community cohesion successfully and actions are implemented to ensure the centre and the students make valuable contributions through its many links with community groups and agencies. The self-evaluation of provision involves all

staff and the centre has a very clear picture of its strengths and areas to improve. However, this understanding is not reflected well in the self-evaluation report where judgements are not always clear. Similarly, the centre's written improvement plan does not always contain sharp targets with clear actions and timescales.

The management committee now oversees all PRU provision within Dudley and has only recently been formed. It is not yet in a position to provide the level of critical support required of it. The local authority provides good support and resources to enable the PRU to provide a good standard of provision. However, uncertainty about the reorganisation of PRU provision within Dudley hampers development planning which includes making improvements to the accommodation for the delivery of food technology and science.

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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	4
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	3
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	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 Sycamore Centre KS3 PRU, Dudley , DY1 3QE

It was good seeing and talking to some of you when I visited the centre. I found the visit very interesting and was pleased how most of you have improved since arriving at the centre. You are getting a good education at the centre. Most students are attending much more than you were when you were at school. You are making good progress in improving the behaviour that resulted in your exclusion from school. Your parents are pleased with the progress you are making and the support you are getting.

I agree that Mrs Kulas and the staff team are providing you with good support to enable you to return to school. Staff work very hard and have your best interests at heart. The lessons and activities you take part in are well planned and most of you complete your work well. Many of you have achieved brilliantly in sport and in projects in dance, drama and art. However, the learning and behaviour targets set for you to achieve and the records of how well you are doing need to be improved so that everyone can see clearly the good progress you are making.

The local authority provides you with good accommodation and resources but the management committee responsible for making sure the centre is running to a high standard is fairly new and could do more to challenge the centre about what it does.

I wish you all the best for your future.

Kath Smith HMI