

Stroud and Cotswold Pupil Referral Services

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	135331
Local Authority	Gloucestershire
Inspection number	329082
Inspection dates	18–19 March 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	6–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	59
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sue Butcher
Headteacher	Maggs Clarke
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Whitminster Centre Ryeleaze Road Stroud Gloucester GL5 1JR
Telephone number	01453 767293
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Stroud and Cotswold Pupil Referral Service caters for students permanently excluded from mainstream schools or at risk of exclusion, as well as students on fixed term exclusions of more than six days. Although registered to take students as young as five, it has never taken any students of this age and there are no plans to do so in the future. The service opened in September 2007 following the amalgamation of two previous centres. The service manager took up her post in September 2008. The service is based on four sites: one for primary-aged students - The Five Valleys Site, two short stay bases for secondary students on fixed term exclusion or at risk of exclusion, and a centre for Year 10 and 11 students who have all been permanently excluded from mainstream schools - The Whitminster Centre. Currently, more than two thirds of the pupils on roll attend the Whitminster Centre.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The overall effectiveness of Stroud and Cotswold Pupil Referral Service is good. Since its establishment in 2007, it has ensured that all students irrespective of their age are well supported and encouraged to re-engage in learning. A key factor in the success of the service for students, parents and carers is the enjoyment students now get from learning. 'My child cannot wait to get to school, she loves it!' This comment is typical of the many overwhelmingly positive responses from parents and carers to their child being with the service.

Students' achievements are good. This is shown in a number of ways, for example, by the success of Year 11 students in external examinations. Last year, all students achieved the targeted number of examination passes set for them. Students achieved particularly good grades in art and information and communication technology. Good achievement is also shown by the success rates of short stay students in returning to a mainstream school. For example, so far this year nine out of ten primary-aged pupils have successfully returned to a mainstream school.

Students make giant strides in their personal development. They improve their behaviour significantly and this results in all of the centres being very positive learning environments. All but a small number of Year 10 and 11 students make very good improvement in their attendance. Students feel very safe at the centres and know that staff will listen to them. For example, one very recent former student commented ... 'I trusted the staff. I knew that they would listen to me so I could open up a bit more.' Given that most of the students at the Whitminster Centre have been previously excluded from education elsewhere, the relaxed, respectful atmosphere of the whole centre is remarkable. It is testament to the excellent progress all students have made with their personal development and the highly effective systems to care for and support them.

Teaching is good at all the centres. Excellent relationships are central to the work of staff backed up by good specialist subject knowledge. The good curriculum is rightly focused on developing students' basic skills, supporting their personal development and giving good opportunities to pass examinations. For those in Year 9 and below, there is a very good emphasis on giving students the skills needed to be able to return and remain in a mainstream school setting. This includes the very good practice of helping students understand the behaviour expectations of the specific school they will return to full time. Both centres are making best use of what is available, but both buildings limit the curriculum that can be offered and the numbers of students who can be supported. The administration office and toilet facilities at one centre are very unsuitable.

The quality of care, support and guidance for students is outstanding and results in students' personal development being excellent. Clear guidance is given as to expectations for behaviour. Teachers carefully monitor students' performance and set clear targets for them. As a result, students have a good understanding about how well they are progressing. This has a very positive impact on boosting their self-confidence and belief in themselves. 'Going to the Whitminster Centre has made a massive difference to me,' is how a Year 11 boy summed up his feelings. A parent of a primary pupil confirmed this by writing of her child, 'He has learnt to handle his emotions a lot better.'

Leadership and management throughout the service are good. Each centre is well managed and ensures that a positive atmosphere for learning is established for all activities. The newly

appointed area manager has added to the solid leadership already established. She has a good vision for how the work of the service can be extended. This, along with the good recent improvements made, confirms the service has a good capacity to keep improving. However, senior staff and the management committee rightly recognise that improvements to the accommodation are needed to help them further develop curriculum opportunities and experiences offered to students. The service correctly acknowledges that more information about pupils' performance in the different centres needs to be collected and collated to enable senior managers to have a clearer overview and to ensure that all students are achieving as well as possible.

What the school should do to improve further

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- Improve the quality of the accommodation at the two centres for short stay students, particularly the administration area and toilets in one of the centres.
- Provide an effective system to collect and collate information about students' performance that will allow senior staff to know all pupils are achieving equally well.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards are often below average but achievement is good. Parents are justifiably impressed, with comments received such as, 'My son has achieved more in five months than in three years in a mainstream school.' Examples of good achievement at the primary centre can be seen with the good progress made by many students within a short space of time of being there. Similarly, in mathematics, many students have moved up a full National Curriculum level during their six-week placements. In all centres, students demonstrate their good progress through achieving a high percentage of the challenging targets set for them.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The students make excellent progress in their personal development and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Students gain a very good appreciation of the benefits of healthy living through regular participation in physical activities and the work of the centres in gaining 'Healthy Schools Plus' status. Students make a positive contribution to the centres and the local community. For example, four girls at the Whitminster Centre talked enthusiastically about their cake making and how they sold the cakes made in town to the general public on the recent Red Nose Day. This is an example of the good understanding pupils have developed on important world issues. Students' future economic well-being is extremely well developed through an excellent citizenship programme that is linked very effectively to work-related learning programmes. Evidence gained through 'readiness to return to school' assessments shows clearly how, during their time at the centres, students have gained a much better understanding of themselves and what they need to do to behave appropriately in the future. They recognise, some for the first time, that learning can be fun and enjoyable, and they regularly make a good effort to do their best. The comment of one student summed up accurately what being at the centre has done for so many students ... 'Since being at the centre, my attitude has improved and now I want to learn again. I feel more confident, and for the first time I feel that I am going to make a success of my life.'

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

In all the centres, teaching is matched well to the individual needs of students. Through their careful marking of students' work, teachers thoroughly assess how well students are progressing and use this information effectively to identify strengths and weaknesses in their performance. Teachers' assessments also include a very good review of students' preferred learning styles. This is communicated to all staff and used well to help students understand themselves and how best they can learn. Typically, lessons are very well planned with clear learning objectives, well prepared resources and a good variety of tasks. Teaching assistants work very effectively with teachers and, because of the excellent relationships all staff have with students, they are very responsive to the support given. This results in students successfully re-engaging in learning.

In both short stay centres, the limitations in the space available can reduce the activities and resources available for lessons and impact on what teachers are able to offer. The accommodation in these centres also severely restricts the numbers of students who can be taught at any one time, which further reduces the impact teaching can have on students' progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Students are given good opportunities to select their own timetable from the options available. Known as 'Pathways to learning', Whitminster students, with staff support, negotiate their own programmes based around taking English and mathematics and up to five GCSE subjects before they join the centre. This is very effective in engaging students in learning. These individual programmes give them good opportunities to pass examinations, as well as to follow practical courses with outside providers or college. Short stay students can continue with courses from their mainstream schools. Often, both short stay and Whitminster students benefit from the individual support to the extent that they exceed their predicted grades in GCSEs.

The excellent citizenship programme, recently acknowledged in a national publication as an example of good practice, gives students a very good understanding of community issues and strong support for their personal development. For example, for the second year running, students are involved in the 'climate change challenge'. This project is designed to help them understand the need to reduce energy usage. They are already on target to reduce the electricity usage in the centre. At the short- stay centres, the range of curriculum activities offered, particularly practical activities, is restricted by the shortage of space, especially as both of the centres have no outside facilities.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Right from when they start at the centres, students are effectively encouraged to make a fresh start and not be held back by previous difficulties. Staff have excellent relationships with students and these are used very well to encourage them to feel relaxed and at ease in each centre. Regular mentoring and excellent feedback means students understand how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve further. Very good specialist work is done with short stay students and this is proving very successful at giving them the skills to be successful

back in a mainstream setting. Whitminster students are equally well prepared for life after school and this leads to extremely positive outcomes when they leave the service. Excellent links with over forty external organisations supplement the work of the service in supporting the needs of pupils very well.

Considerable attention is given to ensure all students are safe. Risk assessments are thorough and staff have up-to-date training in aspects such as child protection and first aid. All safety checks on staff suitability to work with students are carried out.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management have been very effective in ensuring that in each of the centres a good quality of education is provided. Very good progress in developing the services' effectiveness has been made during the short time the service has operated. For example, very good progress has been made in the newly formed primary centre in its work to lessen the chances of students being excluded on return to their mainstream schools. This has already been recognised by the Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF) as an example of good practice.

Much has been done to ensure the service makes a valuable contribution to the community and the students themselves are very clear about wider aspects of the world around them. Senior staff are well supported by the management committee. The committee includes a good range of professionals who have a clear understanding of the impact of the service's work. This has ensured that self- evaluation is good and the service has a good understanding of its effectiveness. The leadership and management rightly identify that they do not have an effective system to collect and collate information about pupils' performance at the different centres. As a result, the senior managers' overview of students' performance is not as clear as it could be.

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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?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which 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	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

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?	1

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**

19 March 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Stroud and Cotswold Pupil Referral Services, Stroud GL5 1BB

Thank you for making both Mr Dobbin and myself so welcome when we visited recently. We very much enjoyed our visit, especially the excellent lunch you prepared for me.

We have written our report and have judged the service to be good. This includes the support and guidance given to you that results in your personal development being excellent. Without doubt, the staff work very hard to make sure they treat you as individuals and give you a fresh start. Those of you on short stay placements make good progress and do very well in learning how to behave appropriately in mainstream school. As a result, we can see that many of you successfully return to your school. Those of you at Whitminster also make good progress in your learning and are well prepared for life after school. Another key reason for this is the excellent provision of individual timetables arranged for you.

Teaching is good in all the centres, with staff working hard to engage you in learning. Excellent relationships with staff help you feel safe. Many of you say that these strong relationships also lead you to trust staff to help you with any difficulties you are facing. All the centres are well led and managed and the new area manager has brought a clear vision for how the service can move forward to improve things even more.

For the service to be even more effective, we believe that the accommodation for those of you on short term placements needs to be improved. In addition, the service rightly recognises it needs a better system to track your progress and this should be implemented as soon as possible.

Keep up with your efforts and good luck for the future.

Yours sincerely

Charles Hackett

Lead inspector