

# Southern Cross School

## Inspection report

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|--------------------------------|---------------------|
| <b>Unique Reference Number</b> | 105623              |
| <b>Local Authority</b>         | Manchester          |
| <b>Inspection number</b>       | 336532              |
| <b>Inspection dates</b>        | 25–26 February 2010 |
| <b>Reporting inspector</b>     | Sonja Oyen HMI      |

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

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|--|---|
| <b>Type of school</b>                      | Special   |
| <b>School category</b>                     | Community special   |
| <b>Age range of pupils</b>                 | 11–16   |
| <b>Gender of pupils</b>                    | Mixed   |
| <b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b> | 64  |
| <b>Appropriate authority</b>               | Interim executive   |
| <b>Chair</b>                               | Mrs Janis Triska  |
| <b>Principal</b>                           | Mrs Angela Schofield  |
| <b>Date of previous school inspection</b>  | 6 March 2007  |
| <b>School address</b>                      | Barlow Hall Road<br>Chorlton-Cum-Hardy<br>Manchester<br>M21 7JJ |
| <b>Telephone number</b>                    | 0161 8812695  |
| <b>Fax number</b>                          | 0161 8617190  |
| <b>Email address</b>                       | head@southerncross.manchester.sch.uk                            |

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|--------------------------|---------------------|
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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an additional inspector. The inspectors visited both sites and visited 13 lessons taught by 11 teachers, three briefing and one tutor sessions. They held two meetings with students and met with the Chair of the Interim Executive Board, the principal of the Federation, the two heads of centre, the business manager and other staff. Among the documents scrutinised were improvement plans, policies and procedures regarding students' welfare and safeguarding, records of assessment, teachers' planning, students' work and completed questionnaires from 28 students, 29 members of staff and nine parents and carers.

- Are students making enough progress to plug the gaps in their learning and to achieve well?
- Is the teaching meeting the needs of individual students and personalising their learning?
- Given recent changes, how well is the school tackling identified areas for improvement?
- How strong is pastoral care? How well is the school supporting those students with the most complex needs?

## Information about the school

This special school is part of the Manchester Federation of schools for learners with emotional, behavioural and social difficulties (EBSD). It provides education for students aged 10-16 with a statement of needs in this area. Almost all of the students have a Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) worker and/or diagnosis. Currently, 33 Key Stage 3 students from the south of Manchester are on roll at the Southern Cross site and 31 students at the school's other site, Castlefield Campus in Hulme, which provides Key Stage 4 provision within the Federation. Staff and students moved into the new Castlefield building at the start of January 2010. The vast majority of the students are male. Several are in the care of the local authority.

The local authority is reorganising the provision for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities and there have been several recent changes in leadership and staffing arrangements at the school and within the Federation. The head of centre at Southern Cross was appointed days before the inspection to the substantive post from an acting headship, and the head of centre at Castlefield was appointed in September 2009. Both are managed by the Principal of the Federation who was appointed in January 2010. A significant number of teaching and support staff at both sites are temporary and a few are seconded from other schools in the Federation. In 2009, the local authority suspended the governing body and set up an Interim Executive Board which oversees the work of Southern Cross as part of the Federation.

**Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate**

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

## Inspection judgements

**Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?**

**4**

**The school's capacity for sustained improvement**

**3**

### Main findings

In accordance with section 13(3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a notice to improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to students' achievement, their attendance and the quality of teaching. Although satisfactory, the school's capacity for sustained improvement has weaker aspects to strengthen.

There are encouraging signs that the school is moving forward after an unsettled period when, as the school recognises, the quality of the provision deteriorated, students became increasingly unruly, chose not to attend and their performance fell far short of their potential. A key element is the resurgence of Southern Cross and Castlefield as places to learn. Students, staff as well as parents and carers agree that changes in leadership have turned things around. All comment on how the two sites are calmer and how students' behaviour is improving with fewer incidents of concern. Attendance is rising although too many students are still absent more than the equivalent of one day per week. One Key Stage 3 teacher commented: 'I now come to school with a smile and feel safe', and Key Stage 4 students commented, 'Things are back in control'. The vision and high expectations of the two heads of centre along with the positive impact of action to manage students' behaviour, to get students back into school and engaged in learning, has boosted staff and students' morale and raised expectations. One Key Stage 3 student commented, 'There is now no reason why we shouldn't do as well as people in mainstream schools'.

Students' underachievement and low standards are linked to weaknesses in the teaching and provision. Parents and carers acknowledge that staff have a good understanding of their children as individuals; care and concern are evident in the daily review sessions when staff discuss students' achievements and problems. However, the information is not then used to specify exactly how best to tailor the provision to meet individual personal and academic needs. The school has effective procedures and links with agencies and services to support students and their families in pastoral, safeguarding and welfare matters. Nonetheless, it remains overly focussed on class or group teaching rather than personalising, not only what each student will study but also how, when, with whom and for how long. Teaching, while satisfactory overall, varies in quality at both key stages. Students' learning is often insecure because individuals have not grasped every aspect. In several lessons, more so at Key Stage 4, learning could not begin or was disrupted when students shouted out, talked back to staff or refused to conform. Not all staff have the expertise needed to deflect such behaviour or the depth

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of subject knowledge to allow them to pick up on misconceptions and gaps in students' understanding. Too much reliance is being placed on independent work to develop basic skills in literacy. As a result, too few students are making the rapid progress needed to make up for lost ground. Similarly, students are making only slow gains in their personal skills; this does not ensure that they are best prepared for the demands of employment or independent study. Current systems to reward students are not motivating them to give of their best.

Much is at an early stage but the principal of the Federation and the heads of centre share a clear, realistic overview of what has to be done. They accept that the school is not as good as it ought to be and that inconsistencies and inadequacies in how it meets the needs of individual students result in unsatisfactory value for money. Issues are being tackled: the curriculum is widening - work placements and involvement in commercial projects catch the older students' interest. This often results in academic and social gains but the quality of such provision is not assured. The updating of systems to track and record students' progress is identifying possible inaccuracies and gaps in the information about students' emotional, social and behavioural development. There is scope to improve the communication with parents and carers, who have not always been kept up-to-date on organisational changes. Similarly, the school's past insularity means it has some way to go to develop students' awareness and involvement with local communities and those further afield. Nevertheless, senior leaders are giving a strong steer, the move to the new Castlefield building was smoothly managed, developments have widened the provision and there has been a rise in attendance, especially from some previously reluctant students. These are positive indications that the school has sufficient capacity to build on 'green shoots' and to continue to improve.

## **What does the school need to do to improve further?**

- Accelerate students' learning, by:
  - tailoring the provision to individual students' needs and styles of learning
  - taking prompt action to support students who show signs of falling behind
  - setting challenging but highly achievable short-term targets to boost students' self-confidence as learners
  - ensuring that rewards are linked more closely to individual targets
  - ensuring that students are given a clear picture of how well they have done and what they need to do to improve.
- Improve the quality of teaching, so that at least 80% is good or better, by:
  - raising staff's expectations of good student behaviour and effective learning
  - ensuring all staff have an extensive bank of effective strategies to manage students' behaviour and to keep low level disruption to a minimum
  - ensuring that teachers have the necessary subject knowledge to deliver the curriculum and the expertise to teach basic skills in reading, writing and

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mathematics

- identifying the steps needed to make students' learning secure and modelling them effectively.
- Raise attendance to at least 85% by using the information from an analysis of trends and patterns in attendance to make organisational changes and to implement individual programmes.
- Strengthen the school's capacity for sustained improvement, by
  - ensuring that governors in the planned committees (to take over from the Interim Executive Board) have the skills and knowledge needed to evaluate critically the school's performance
  - sharpening the skills of senior managers and subject leaders in evaluating the impact of action against intended outcomes for students and identifying what has been effective and why
  - sharing expertise and using more creatively resources within the school and Federation to fill gaps in students' learning and to raise standards overall.

**Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils****4**

Most students leave at the age of 16 with some qualifications and awards and a small number have gained good passes at GCSE. The school works well with other agencies and partners to ensure that all students move into further education or employment and training when they leave. However, overall standards in English and mathematics are low. Although some students are articulate, in lessons and discussions, too many find it hard to express themselves clearly and to explain their thinking. Many struggle with reading and are reluctant writers, which affects their work across the board. There are examples of neat presentation and good choice of words: the Key Stage 3 students' brochures on how to survive an earthquake showed effective use of clear instructions. Similarly, some of the art work is of a good standard at both key stages. The DVD showing some Key Stage 4 students' work with commercial artists to produce screen printed T-shirts, highlights well how latent potential can be realised and strides made in personal skills.

The school's data indicates that most students at both key stages, whatever their starting points and individual needs, have not made the progress they should in previous terms. In lessons, students were learning, but the gains were highest when the adults were effective in keeping the students' attention. Key Stage 4 students moved on in their understanding of how to interpret scattergraphs because of the adults' effective questioning and clues to ground new information in what students already knew. Smiles of satisfaction were also evident when Key Stage 3 students quickly and accurately rounded decimals. Students reflected maturely on their time at school; they said their problems are listened to and dealt with. In the view of Key Stage 3 students, the head of centre had done the right thing to remove those students who cause the most disruption as 'Southern Cross is now safe and we can learn'. Staged re-integration is allowing all students to gain confidence in the new systems. Throughout the inspection,

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most students behaved sensibly, although not all are keen to start learning. Too many rely on adults for prompts and help. Students were eager to be active; sports are popular and students want to do well in the fitness tests. The school council at Southern Cross has lapsed but newly appointed councillors at Castlefield have already requested additional sports facilities, and some students have come up with ideas for a Castlefield logo and motto.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

|   |          |
|---|----------|
| <b>Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b>  | <b>4</b> |
| Taking into account:<br>Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>   | 4        |
| The quality of pupils' learning and their progress  | 4        |
| The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress                      | 4        |
| <b>The extent to which pupils feel safe</b>   | <b>3</b> |
| <b>Pupils' behaviour</b>  | <b>3</b> |
| <b>The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles</b>  | <b>3</b> |
| <b>The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community</b>  | <b>4</b> |
| <b>The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being</b> | <b>4</b> |
| Taking into account:<br>Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>   | 4        |
| <b>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b>  | <b>3</b> |

**How effective is the provision?**

The support and teaching staff work well together as a team and where this is at its best, students gain personally and academically. For instance, a teacher's insistence on good behaviour, her use of repetition and demonstration, the change in activities with increasing challenge, all ensured that two Key Stage 3 students made marked strides in learning to read, play and appreciate music. The teaching assistant's participation also encouraged them to concentrate for a long period. In many lessons, teachers' expectations of individual's behaviour or learning are not high enough. Planning for lessons does not identify clearly how the content will be tailored to meet individual's

<sup>1</sup> The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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needs and enable students to meet their targets. Opportunities are missed to encourage individuals to review their own learning and to identify and agree specific points for improvement.

Students and staff appreciate the new Castlefield building; staff are working to ensure that the dedicated subject rooms provide a supportive learning environment. At Southern Cross, eye-catching displays of students' work often disguise well the building's tired state. The school makes effective provision for those who are being tutored at home and/or re-integrated into school. Sessions in the social and emotional aspects of learning are prominent at both key stages. Effective steps have been taken to improve the provision in key subjects and to provide additional support work, although this is not yet having a marked impact on attainment. The school has effective links with other providers to widen the curriculum, especially at Key Stage 4, thus enabling students to gain workplace experience and awards in areas other than traditional academic routes. The involvement of a family support worker has enabled the school to work productively with families and students who are especially resistant to schooling. In several cases, the cooperation and tailoring of provision has led to students attending more regularly and also to a positive change in their attitudes. The school is prompt to follow up concerns and to explore different ways to resolve issues.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

|  |          |
|--|----------|
| <b>The quality of teaching</b>   | <b>3</b> |
| Taking into account:<br>The use of assessment to support learning  | 4        |
| <b>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships</b> | <b>3</b> |
| <b>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</b>   | <b>3</b> |

**How effective are leadership and management?**

The principal of the Federation, Chair of the Interim Executive Board and two heads of centre are committed to improving the quality of what the school provides. They have given staff a renewed sense of purpose and rightly focussed on bringing order and establishing an accurate assessment of students' needs. They have an informed overview of the quality of teaching and have taken steps to support staff and to ensure greater consistency in planning. All safeguarding procedures are in line with government requirements; staff have recently been trained and updated in key welfare procedures. Senior leaders are aware that although students' pastoral needs may have been served well, this is not the case in respect of their academic needs and underachievement has grown. The school has not analysed the performance of individuals well enough to ensure that what it provides gives each student every chance to achieve well. The current work to establish a clear profile for each student is now providing the information needed to make decisions about what is best for each individual. Although a



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'school family' is recognisable at Southern Cross and at Castlefield, the heads of centre know that little has been done to date to reach out to the wider community. They are making contact with families, parents and carers as well as developing links with the local communities. The intention to overhaul the curriculum and place students' needs at the heart provides a chance to review the length of lessons and to be more radical in approach.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

|  |          |
|--|----------|
| <b>The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement</b>  | <b>3</b> |
| Taking into account:<br>The leadership and management of teaching and learning   | 3        |
| <b>The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met</b> | <b>3</b> |
| <b>The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers</b>  | <b>3</b> |
| <b>The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being</b>  | <b>3</b> |
| <b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination</b>   | <b>4</b> |
| <b>The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures</b>  | <b>3</b> |
| <b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion</b>   | <b>4</b> |
| <b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>  | <b>4</b> |

## Views of parents and carers

Because students returned to school from half-term on the first day of the inspection, it was difficult for the school to ensure that all parents and carers received a questionnaire in the time available. Of the nine returned, three had additional comments. In the main, parents and carers are satisfied with the education and support their children receive at the school. Although one comment was, 'My son has done very well', other responses indicated concerns about progress. The inspection team agrees that students are not making the progress they could. It is also less positive than the parents and carers in judgements about the quality of the overall provision and how well individual needs are met. This is reflected in the points to indicate what the school needs to do to improve further.

## Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Southern Cross School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received nine completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 64 pupils registered at the school.

| Statements  | Strongly Agree |    | Agree |    | Disagree |    | Strongly disagree |    |
|---|----------------|----|-------|----|----------|----|-------------------|----|
|   | Total          | %  | Total | %  | Total    | %  | Total             | %  |
| My child enjoys school  | 7              | 78 | 1     | 11 | 0        | 0  | 1                 | 11 |
| The school keeps my child safe  | 7              | 78 | 2     | 22 | 0        | 0  | 0                 | 0  |
| The school informs me about my child's progress   | 7              | 78 | 1     | 11 | 1        | 11 | 0                 | 0  |
| My child is making enough progress at this school   | 7              | 78 | 0     | 0  | 2        | 22 | 0                 | 0  |
| The teaching is good at this school   | 7              | 78 | 1     | 11 | 0        | 0  | 0                 | 0  |
| The school helps me to support my child's learning  | 8              | 89 | 0     | 0  | 1        | 11 | 0                 | 0  |
| The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle   | 7              | 78 | 1     | 11 | 0        | 0  | 0                 | 0  |
| The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment) | 5              | 56 | 2     | 22 | 1        | 11 | 0                 | 0  |
| The school meets my child's particular needs  | 6              | 67 | 2     | 22 | 1        | 11 | 0                 | 0  |
| The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour  | 7              | 78 | 2     | 22 | 0        | 0  | 0                 | 0  |
| The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns   | 6              | 67 | 2     | 22 | 1        | 11 | 0                 | 0  |
| The school is led and managed effectively   | 8              | 89 | 0     | 0  | 0        | 0  | 0                 | 0  |
| Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school   | 7              | 78 | 1     | 11 | 1        | 11 | 0                 | 0  |

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

## Glossary

### What inspection judgements mean

| Grade   | Judgement    | Description  |
|---------|--------------|--|
| Grade 1 | Outstanding  | These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.  |
| Grade 2 | Good         | These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.  |
| Grade 3 | Satisfactory | These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.  |
| Grade 4 | Inadequate   | These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves. |

### Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

| Type of school       | Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools) |      |              |            |
|----------------------|---|------|--------------|------------|
|                      | Outstanding   | Good | Satisfactory | Inadequate |
| Nursery schools      | 39  | 58   | 3            | 0          |
| Primary schools      | 13  | 50   | 33           | 4          |
| Secondary schools    | 17  | 40   | 34           | 9          |
| Sixth forms          | 18  | 43   | 37           | 2          |
| Special schools      | 26  | 54   | 18           | 2          |
| Pupil referral units | 7   | 55   | 30           | 7          |
| All schools          | 15  | 49   | 32           | 5          |

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

## Common terminology used by inspectors

|                            |  |
|----------------------------|--|
| Achievement:               | the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.  |
| Attainment:                | the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.   |
| Capacity to improve:       | the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.   |
| Leadership and management: | the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.   |
| Learning:                  | how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.   |
| Overall effectiveness:     | <p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li><li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li><li>■ The quality of teaching.</li><li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.</li><li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li></ul> |
| Progress:                  | the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.  |

**This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.**



1 March 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Southern Cross School, Manchester, M21 7JJ

Thank you for your help when Pauline Hilling-Smith and I visited Southern Cross and Castlefield to see how well you are learning. We welcomed your comments and many thanks to the 28 of you who completed a questionnaire. We also had replies from some of your families and most of the staff. All have helped us to get a rounded overview of the school as a whole.

You told us that things are better than they were and we agree. We also agree that the adults care about you, that school is a safe place and that the staff do a good job in helping you to manage your behaviour. Not all of you enjoy school or feel that you are learning a lot. We know that not all of you come to school when you should and we agree that you could be learning more. Some of you also have concerns about the behaviour of others and we saw how at times it is very difficult to concentrate. We have given the school a 'notice to improve' because there are particular aspects that are not as good as they ought to be. Your new heads of centre are making changes, which we can see not all of you like, but which we agree are necessary if you are to do really well. Some of your work shows that many of you have hidden talents and the potential to excel. With your help, the school could make it all happen.

We have particularly asked the Interim Executive Board, Principal of the Federation and heads of centre to:

- make sure that as many lessons as possible help you to move on quickly; that the teachers focus on what you each need to learn and work with you to agree targets and make sure you know exactly what to do to be better
- share all those little ways they have of helping you to manage your behaviour and keep you focussed in lessons
- try to find out what it is that keeps you away from school and work with you to make school more interesting so that all of you come every day
- work together to decide what works and what doesn't and to see how best they can use what the Federation offers to meet your needs.

Yours sincerely,

Sonja Øyen

Her Majesty's Inspector

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