

Melrose School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	102697
Local Authority	Merton
Inspection number	308089
Inspection date	12 June 2008
Reporting inspector	Greg Sorrell

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	34
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr James Holmes
Headteacher	Mr Steve Childs
Date of previous school inspection	18 April 2005
School address	Church Road Mitcham CR4 3BE
Telephone number	020 8646 2620
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Age group	11-16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Melrose School is a community special school for students aged 11 - 16. All have a statement of special educational needs relating to social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and some have additional learning difficulties. There is a minority of girls and three pupils are looked after children. The school works in partnership with a number of local schools. It was recently awarded Sportsmark and is seeking the Healthy Schools award. The headteacher has been in post for three weeks having previously been seconded for two terms during uncertainty about the school's future pending the local authority's special educational needs re-organisation. From September 2008, the school will also provide accommodation and staff for up to ten students on assessment placements leading to admission to the school or a return to mainstream education.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Melrose School provides satisfactory education and care for its students. The school has responded well to the significant challenges it has faced since the last inspection. The most important issues related to uncertainty about the school's role within the local authority, headteacher recruitment and retention of staff. Now that these issues have been recently resolved, in a short time the re-organised senior management team have a clear view of improvement. School development planning illustrates a clear link between improved provision and increases in students' achievement, better attendance and behaviour. Improved use of progress and behaviour data, although not yet fully acted upon, is showing early signs of a positive impact.

Students' progress is satisfactory, as is the quality of teaching. Teaching has recently improved to include a more relevant curriculum and more relevant lessons in English, personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE) and information and communication technology (ICT). The previously identified strengths in mathematics, science, art and work-related learning have been maintained. The curriculum is satisfactory overall, although opportunities are missed to assess, accredit and report on academic gains made during the afternoon provision of 'social development' activities. However, this and the programme of alternative provision for some students has seen attendance levels increase.

Robust procedures ensure students' well-being is appropriately safeguarded. Care, guidance and support is satisfactory. It is good in respect of guiding students' choices when leaving school and the partnership with external agencies has had a positive impact on students' behaviour. Students are well aware of their behavioural targets but not so sure about how to improve their work. The support for a minority of students with specific learning difficulties has weaknesses because too few staff have the expertise to address literacy issues such as reading difficulties.

The students' personal development is satisfactory, as is their behaviour. Most respond well to their 'bank account of rewards' although some continue to present a significant challenge to the school. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding is satisfactory. The majority of parents are very supportive of all that the school does, although a few are concerned about bullying. The school's actions in this regard are timely and appropriate.

The governing body gives good support on personnel, premises and finance issues although their role in evaluating students' achievement is a focus for development. The school has made satisfactory progress since the last inspection and its capacity to improve further is also satisfactory.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the analysis of progress by all staff and governors to ensure that all students are achieving as well as they can.
- Improve the support given to students who have additional learning difficulties, especially in literacy.
- Maximise assessment and reporting opportunities provided by the afternoon social development programmes.

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

The majority of students arrive with academic standards that are well below those expected nationally as a result of their individual special educational needs, exclusion and erratic attendance. On leaving school standards are still well below national expectations. Nevertheless their achievement is satisfactory as they gain ground in literacy and numeracy skills, science, ICT, art and PSHCE.

At the end of the last academic year, the majority of students in Key Stage 3 achieved Levels 3 to 5 in mathematics and science, though achievement was much lower in English. Analysis of English performance indicated underachievement due to weaknesses in the provision, which have now been remedied for the vast majority. At the end of Key Stage 4, students took up to five GCSEs in English, mathematics, science, art and design and religious education. These subjects were also available at entry level. All students achieved at least one qualification and 25% gained five GCSE passes. A small number gained accreditation from college or other provision. Recent improvements in attendance, data analysis, teaching and curriculum demonstrate that the school is aware of how to raise students' achievement.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Most students enjoy school, as seen by their improved attendance compared to their previous schools. On arrival, some take advantage of breakfast club and show a developing awareness of healthy eating. Despite the school's efforts some students fail to attend regularly and this has an adverse effect upon their achievement. Students' behaviour is satisfactory and exclusions are falling. They feel safe and able to discuss problems with staff. One commented, 'They are more like friends than teachers.'

Most show respect for school rules and rewards system. Inevitably, some find it difficult to maintain acceptable behaviour all day and they benefit from support and mentoring. Low level unsatisfactory behaviour is more common than serious incidents. For example, running in corridors, swearing or irritation with peers require staff to monitor behaviour closely and restrict students' free movement within the building. Through the curriculum, students experience the cultures and faiths of others and develop a sound spiritual and cultural understanding. They make a satisfactory contribution to the community through work experience, displays of work within the borough and an increasing inclination to support peers experiencing difficulties, for example, seeking to defuse incidents as they occur. Provision for the 'pupil voice' is at a developmental stage, although students have expressed preferences for school improvement and exercise options for some activities. The 'Trout in Schools' project enabled them to show an awareness of caring for wildlife and conservation. Through work-related learning and college placements they gain a good awareness of the world after school. The vast majority take up opportunities for exercise and understand the importance of a healthy diet and the need to stay safe.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall, but with examples that are good especially where teachers have good subject knowledge and engage the students in meaningful activities. In an English lesson, the teacher employed a good range of teaching and learning styles to explore the importance of relationships in 'Mice and Men'. The students responded well to the relaxed atmosphere and lively reading that was rich in expression. Where the lesson content is well matched to the students' needs, there is less emphasis on managing off-task behaviour, but this is inconsistent. Teaching assistants and other pastoral staff, including the on-site police officer, make a good contribution to managing students' behaviour. The quality of relationships is good overall although some students find it difficult to settle and their learning is impeded as a result. There is good evidence that students' behaviour in other settings such as a local college of further education and work placements is good and thus promotes their economic well being effectively. Staff give the students good feedback about their behaviour. Learning intentions are communicated at the start of lessons, but these are sometimes too broad to be accurately assessed at the end of the lesson so students are not always clear what they have learned.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory overall and is relevant to the students' needs through its focus on English, mathematics, science, ICT and PSHCE. Each morning has an academic focus while afternoons are given over to 'social development opportunities.' These experiences are predominantly practical and several take place off-site. This provision has had a positive effect on students' attendance and behaviour. However, opportunities to assess gains in learning during some of these activities are missed and do not appear in students' reports. For example, clear links between gardening, sports activities and film club are not always made with science, physical education and English respectively. The work-related curriculum continues to be a strength of the school. In Key Stage 4, students also access work experience and courses provided by colleges of further education and external bodies. Such courses include motor vehicle engineering and construction skills. A small number of students follow the successful 'engagement curriculum' largely off-site, in order to encourage them to develop positive attitudes to learning and prepare them for life after school. The PSHCE courses help to ensure that students understand the importance of sex education and drugs awareness, as well as learning to build relationships which promote healthy and safe lifestyles. There are optional activities at lunch time. Opportunities for competitive sports are provided and 'breakfast club' has a good impact on the students' well-being and understanding of health related matters.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The school works closely with other agencies to support the students' personal and emotional development. The majority of parents appreciate the work done by the school and one wrote, 'The staff have supported my child every step of the way.' A small minority expressed concerns about bullying, although all instances are investigated thoroughly. The vast majority of exclusions result from physical assaults, although incidents are reducing and attendance is improving.

Students know their behavioural targets well, although they are less clear about what is required to improve their academic skills. Significant measures are provided to support their emotional and behavioural development, for example, the recently introduced behaviour tracking and analysis of time spent out of learning. The school acknowledges the weaknesses in the support for students with identified additional learning difficulties due to insufficient staff expertise. There are appropriate systems to minimise risk and to ensure the students' well-being. Safeguarding and child protection procedures are well established and clearly understood by staff. Academic guidance is satisfactory overall. Its quality varies across the different programmes, although recently introduced learning mentors provide good support valued by students. Annual reviews and those for 'looked after children' are conducted appropriately.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The quality of leadership, management and governance is satisfactory. In a relatively short time, the recently appointed headteacher and restructured senior management team have begun to create a common sense of purpose following a significant period of uncertainty beyond the school's control. Although not yet fully implemented by all staff, improved use of data to track progress and behaviour is improving the quality of education and accuracy of self-evaluation, which is currently satisfactory. The routine gathering of evidence and analysis of progress data to inform subject planning is at an early stage although it is well developed in mathematics. Further appropriate initiatives and developments are underway. Many require close relationships with other agencies who work in a well managed partnership. The school is conscious of the need to support external providers in meeting needs of students and these links are well managed and overseen by staff. The governors have relevant expertise in personnel, premises and finance. They have been closely involved in local authority planning for reorganisation; however, their role in evaluating their own students' achievement is a weakness. The recent acquisition of a governor with special educational needs expertise is intended to strengthen this area. Finances are well managed and appropriately audited to ensure the budget will meet staffing requirements of the pupil referral provision next year.

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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	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
How well learners enjoy their education	3
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	3
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
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 the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

¹ Grade 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.

Annex A

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	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

26 June 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Melrose School, Mitcham, CR4 3BE

Thank you for helping me to get to know your school last week and for the warm welcome. I found that you make satisfactory progress while at the school. The school has had lots of problems beyond its control in the past but now they have been sorted out it can look forward with confidence to the future. Your new headteacher and his senior management team have been working hard to enable the school to give you the education you need now and in the future.

The teaching you receive from the staff is satisfactory and sometimes it is good. You get lots of support to help you improve your behaviour and it is clear you become more confident as you get older. Your behaviour is satisfactory overall, but some of you could improve how you behave in lessons and also in the corridor. Your attendance has improved and this can help you improve how good your grades are when you take exams.

You obviously enjoy practical lessons such as art and physical education. The range of lessons and other activities such as those in the afternoons are satisfactory. These experiences and your time on work experience and at college prepare you well for leaving school. You mostly get on well with the staff and your fellow pupils, but sometimes interfering with others stops you all learning as well as you should.

The school works hard to keep you fit and healthy. The breakfast club gives you a good start to the day and your physical education lessons help you a lot. The wall displays of work in art and physical education show you achieve well in these subjects. In order to improve the school further, I am asking your headteacher to improve the way the staff and governors use all the information they have about how well you are doing. I'm also asking him see that those of you who need extra support with literacy get it. Finally, the school needs to ensure all your afternoon activities are assessed as well as the morning lessons.

I wish you lots of luck in the future.

Yours sincerely

Greg Sorrell

Lead Inspector