

Southampton PRU the Melbourne Centre

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	133675
Local Authority	Southampton
Inspection number	328724
Inspection dates	4–5 March 2009
Reporting inspector	William Geoffrey Robson

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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	96
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Headteacher	Mr Gary Gwinnell-Smith
Date of previous school inspection	17 January 2006
School address	18 Melbourne Street Chapel Southampton SO14 5FB
Telephone number	02380 215 320
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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

The pupil referral unit (PRU) provides for students with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. They have either been permanently excluded from mainstream schools, or are at risk of permanent exclusion. The unit has two centres, approximately five miles apart. The Compass Centre is for Key Stage 3 students, most of whom initially attend for a nine-week programme, aimed at enabling them to return to mainstream schools. The Melbourne Centre is for Key Stage 4 students. It also provides an outreach service for students who refuse to attend school. The large majority of students are of White British origin. A small number are of mixed White and Black Caribbean background. About three quarters of students are boys and there are currently seven looked after children. Since the retirement of the previous headteacher one year ago, a temporary headteacher has been appointed. He is employed in a part-time capacity for three days each week, supported by a member of staff in charge at each centre.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

In accordance with section 13(3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement.

The recently appointed temporary headteacher has considerably improved the leadership. However, aspects of management remain unsatisfactory. For example, the unit is unable to evaluate the achievement of students in 2007 and 2008 because it has no information about their attainment when they first arrived. Procedures for collecting data are improving, but targets for current Year 10 and 11 students are not sufficiently challenging. Improvement since the last inspection has been inadequate, particularly regarding two specific recommendations. First, the unit has not succeeded in improving students' attendance enough. Exceptionally low attendance in all years means that standards remain very low and students do not achieve as well as they should. Second, the unit still fails to ensure that all students benefit from full-time provision in Years 7 to 9. These students only have a maximum of 21 hours tuition each week. While planning for the reorganisation of provision for vulnerable children, the local authority suspended the appointment of permanent staff last year. This affected the continuity of teaching and learning, although most vacancies have now been filled with permanent staff from the start of this academic year. However, the key posts of headteacher and member of staff in charge of The Melbourne Centre remain temporary. This continuing uncertainty and poor track record since the last inspection mean that the unit has inadequate capacity for further improvement.

In these difficult circumstances, the temporary headteacher has made an impressive start to improving provision. He has quickly and correctly identified key areas for development. Over the last term he has begun to monitor teaching and learning and has agreed a policy of performance management with staff. Notably, he has ensured that teachers have started to use assessment more effectively. At the Compass Centre in particular, teachers are clear about students' levels of attainment. They use this information to plan lessons well, set targets for students and keep parents and mainstream schools informed of their progress. Consequently, the majority of students in Years 7 to 9 who are at risk of exclusion are able to return to school. In both centres, teaching and learning are satisfactory; those students who attend regularly make satisfactory progress. Staff say that their own morale has greatly improved and it is clear that they are admirably dedicated to supporting students as well as they can. As a result, students' personal development and well-being are satisfactory. Outreach support rarely succeeds in getting persistent absentees to attend, but does ensure that the majority move on to further education after Year 11. Students say that they feel safe and can share their difficulties with staff. One girl said that this is because, 'if you do something wrong, teachers don't judge you, they help you.' Those who attend regularly are helped to improve their behaviour because of the staff's consistent use of the behaviour policy. Students respect each other's cultures and traditions. They say that there is no racism and that teachers deal with any bullying effectively. They are keen to participate in charity events and donate money to local charities of their choice.

Staff work hard to establish links with mainstream schools to help prevent the permanent exclusion of students. These links are beginning to impact on the quality of provision as the

PRU is increasingly using assessment information to plan more effectively for individual students and to offer a wider range of GCSE subjects.

Much remains to be done. Some sections of the development plan are incomplete and await implementation. The considerable recent improvements have not yet had a clear impact on outcomes for students. Strategies to address persistent absence are beginning to have an effect. However, overall attendance remains close to 50%, so that too many students continue to underachieve.

What the school should do to improve further

- Extend the range of strategies to improve students' attendance and reduce the high number of persistent absentees.
- Strengthen the capacity to improve by appointing permanent staff in key leadership and management positions.
- Raise achievement by setting challenging targets for students in all years, based on accurate assessment of their attainment on entry.
- Collect and rigorously analyse data to evaluate the unit's performance.
- Ensure that all students have the recommended full-time provision.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Students enter the unit with below-average standards because of difficulties they have experienced in mainstream schools. Those who attend regularly make satisfactory progress in lessons. Students in Years 7 to 9 who follow the nine-week reintegration programme at The Compass Centre often make good progress. This is because they have more positive attitudes than those who are permanently excluded, and an immediate goal to return to mainstream school. Last year approximately half of Year 11 students gained GCSE passes in English and mathematics. Several others gained entry-level qualifications in these and other subjects. They achieved unit awards for a range of subjects, from gardening to bicycle maintenance. Current students are on track to gain similar qualifications. However, the very low rate of attendance means that the majority of students underachieve. Teachers target lower-level qualifications for many students because they know that their attendance is so poor. Overall standards are therefore very low and achievement is inadequate.

There is no difference between the progress of girls and boys. Looked after children and those from minority ethnic groups also make similar progress, with their achievement similarly restricted by erratic attendance.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Students who attend clearly enjoy their time in the unit. They say that because there are fewer students than in mainstream school, it is easier to learn. They establish good relationships with teachers and feel safe. In discussion, all students agreed with one boy who said, 'You make friends as soon as you walk through the doors.' Behaviour improves the longer students attend the unit. Although there are still some instances of challenging behaviour in lessons, students act responsibly during break and lunchtimes. Courses in personal, social and health education develop students' awareness of healthy, safe lifestyles. Despite this obvious awareness, many still smoke. Most are keen to participate in a good range of sports and outdoor pursuits. Several

say that they would like to have hot meals but these facilities are not available. Students make a satisfactory contribution to the community. They are very willing to raise money for charities of their choice, by making and selling greetings cards and contributing to Comic Relief and Sports Relief. They feel that their views are taken into account, but have no opportunity to take responsibility on a formal basis as there is no student council. Although in many cases students have weak literacy and numeracy skills, those who attend regularly increase their life chances well, by participating in a good range of vocational courses and work experience, either in the PRU, the local college or with local training providers. Many students gain certificates in skills for working life.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teachers establish good relationships with students. This enables them to deal effectively with any incidents of challenging behaviour, sometimes by skilfully avoiding confrontation with students. They involve teaching assistants well in their planning, so that students with more severe behavioural difficulties, or literacy difficulties, participate as fully as possible in lessons. At times, the focus on controlling behaviour prevents teachers from encouraging students to take more responsibility for their own learning. Teachers' use of assessment is developing well as a result of recent monitoring of lessons by the headteacher, but is inconsistent. In an excellent English lesson, Year 8 and 9 students were frequently reminded of the learning objectives and were clear about how well they were achieving them. However, in some other lessons teachers do not ask students to think enough about what they are learning, or what they need to improve. Teachers use a good variety of resources in lessons, which interest and motivate students. They make good use of computer projection, but miss some opportunities to use interactive whiteboards more imaginatively. In many lessons the careful planning and preparation for lessons is unfortunately wasted, because so many students do not attend. Consequently, their learning is severely disrupted.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

In Years 7 to 9 The Compass Centre places a suitable emphasis on literacy and numeracy during the nine-week programme for students who are at risk of permanent exclusion. Students also enjoy working with the Creative Partnership organisation and produce media presentations, while reflecting on personal, social and moral issues. Students attending The Compass Centre who have been permanently excluded from mainstream schools spend a large proportion of their time following a course in personal and social education, led by the local Youth Service. This helps them to consider their own attitudes and behaviour. They also study English and mathematics, but the number of hours provided for all students in Years 7 to 9 does not fulfil the requirements for students in secondary education.

Students rightly consider that The Melbourne Centre provides a very good choice of subjects. Links with the local college, training providers and businesses provide good opportunities for work experience and the study of vocational courses in Years 10 and 11. These are extended through courses in, for example, construction and nail art, which appeal to both boys and girls. An accredited information and communication technology course further supports students' future economic well-being. This year science has been introduced for the first time and has

extended the range of available awards. However, students currently study only English and mathematics at GCSE level. Consequently, the higher-attaining students are not challenged sufficiently to achieve as well as they could.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 4

The introduction of an improved attendance policy has had a limited effect on reducing absence. Procedures for monitoring attendance are very clear, but simply highlight that more needs to be done to get students to attend. Attendance targets are imprecise and there is not enough concerted action to bring improvement. Some mainstream schools do not provide enough information about the prior attainment of students they have excluded. The assessment of these students when they arrive is improving, but it is not accurate enough to ensure that all are guided to achieve sufficiently challenging academic targets.

Good links with a range of agencies enable the unit to provide good support for students with more severe needs. Students also benefit from good advice and guidance for their future careers. As a result, most move on to further education, employment or training when they leave the unit. This includes some students who have previously refused to attend the unit. An outreach teacher visits their homes regularly and ensures that they receive as much support as possible to move on to college courses after Year 11.

Leadership and management

Grade: 4

All aspects of leadership and management have been hampered since the last inspection by uncertainty about the unit's future. This led to a moratorium on the appointment of permanent staff and a reliance on supply teachers. Two key positions of overall headteacher and head of The Melbourne Centre remain temporary, which adds to the uncertainty. The acting headteacher has a very clear understanding of the improvements needed and has quickly gained the confidence of staff. He provides very good leadership. Teaching and learning are now closely monitored and the development plan includes appropriate, key priorities. Procedures for self-evaluation are improving through the collection of data about students' performance and progress. However, there is still insufficient data available from which to set challenging targets. A management committee was formed in the autumn term 2008 and met for the second time during the current term. Members include parents, teachers and representatives of the local community. They have quickly reviewed the unit's policies and rectified several areas which were not meeting statutory requirements. They are well informed and supportive, but are unable to challenge the performance of the unit fully because clear criteria for evaluating its work have not been established.

The unit makes a satisfactory contribution to community cohesion by ensuring that students learn about and understand different cultures and beliefs. Students from different ethnic backgrounds get on well together. The headteacher and management committee are developing closer links with mainstream schools, to help them to avoid excluding students and increase rates of successful reintegration.

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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?	4
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	4

Achievement and standards

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

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?	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
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	3
The attendance of learners	4
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	3

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?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	4

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	4
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	4
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	4
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	4
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	3
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4
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?	Yes
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

20 April 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Southampton PRU the Melbourne Centre, Southampton, SO14 5FB

Thank you for making me welcome when I visited the unit recently. I enjoyed speaking to you and seeing the work that you are doing. It was good to see that you get on well with your teachers and that you are improving your behaviour. I know that staff try very hard to help you to do well during a difficult time in your lives. In particular, they help many of you to return successfully to school or to go college. You may have heard that, as a result of my visit, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector has decided that the unit requires special measures. This means that although it does some things well, in some important areas there are weaknesses which need attention.

To make rapid improvements I have asked the management committee staff to:

- do everything possible to improve your attendance so that you can make better progress
- appoint a permanent headteacher and head of The Melbourne Centre
- set you more challenging targets so that you achieve higher standards
- gather information about how well the unit is doing now, so that it can do even better in the future
- make sure that you all have full-time education.

You can help your teachers to do some of these things. In particular, many of you need to make every effort to attend your courses more regularly and make the most of the opportunities on offer. Inspectors will be coming back in due course to check how well things are progressing.

In the meantime, very best wishes for the future.

Yours faithfully

William Robson

Lead Inspector