

Midpoint Centre

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	134256
Local Authority	Wolverhampton
Inspection number	341446
Inspection dates	17–18 March 2010
Reporting inspector	Alan Lemon

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	14–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	61
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Councillor Christine Mills
Headteacher	Miss Dee McIlmurray
Date of previous school inspection	16 May 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The majority of time was spent looking at learning, and nine lessons and seven teachers were seen. Inspectors held meetings with members of the management committee, staff, the school improvement partner and an officer of the local authority. They observed the centre's work, undertook case studies of individual students, looked at students' work, teachers' records, a range of policies, staff and student questionnaires and four parental questionnaires.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the centre's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- whether there is sufficient evidence of students' progress
- the degree of challenge in the targets set for each student
- whether assessment is thorough and being used effectively
- the extent to which leaders and managers are focused sharply on improvement.

Information about the school

The Midpoint Centre provides places for up to 120 students in Key Stage 4. Most students have either been permanently excluded from a mainstream school or were at risk of being excluded. Many have become disengaged from education, have a history of poor attendance and some may not have attended school at all for a significant period of time. Over half of those currently on roll have a statement of special educational needs identifying behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. These students transfer from their special school at the end of Key Stage 3, which is the age limit of that school, to the Midpoint Centre in order to complete Key Stage 4. Many of these students have difficulties in literacy and numeracy. Almost half of the students are known to be eligible for free school meals. Five students are looked after by their local authority. The large majority are from White British backgrounds. Very few students currently on roll are girls.

The school was awarded Healthy School Status in December 2008.

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

4

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 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.

Insufficient progress has been made on improving the aspects of the school's work identified as issues for improvement in the last inspection. These comprised weaknesses in the use of assessment, the setting of students' targets, how both of these contribute to progress and raising achievement, and tackling high level of non-attendance and persistent absence. Leaders have failed to set a sufficiently strong direction to achieve the necessary improvements and the school is still faced with these issues. In addition, their expectations are not high enough to ensure improvements are embedded throughout the school. The school's self-evaluation, including the lack of a full understanding of students' progress in particular, is not a sufficient force for improvement. The management committee has taken too much at face value in relation to the work of leaders in improving the school and committee members have not challenged the school robustly enough.

Leaders have developed procedures for monitoring students' attainments, although what can be gained from the data, produced in relation to students' progress, is too limited. The limited information on each student's prior attainment, together with the school's initial assessment of each student, which is not secure, makes it difficult to be certain that learning and progress are adequate. The outcomes of assessment are not fed effectively into planning the curriculum and each student's work. This makes much of teaching inadequate, especially in relation to English and literacy. The impact of teaching is also weakened by the restricted range of approaches used to promote learning in the classroom. Nevertheless, some good teaching exists, especially in vocational subjects. The school has seen that literacy provision needed strengthening and has put in place strategies to address this but these are not embedded and have not shown a noticeable impact on attainment. Students' targets are not sharply focused on what they need to learn to improve their knowledge and skills, especially in English where their use to improve learning and secure progress is inadequate. Practice in English lessons does not match the school's expectations for using targets and leaders have not monitored this effectively. The school is not well-equipped to meet some of the essential needs of students with statements, particularly in their difficulties with literacy. As a result, they have less opportunity to learn and make progress than other students. Students' behaviour, including those with statements, is satisfactory and is helped by

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the positive relationships staff have with them. The richness of the vocational work and activities on offer and students' enjoyment of these is also an incentive for many of them to develop a positive outlook, behave appropriately and make friends. However, this excludes a significant number of students who do not attend school regularly, who fail to make progress and are, therefore, insufficiently prepared for their future economic-well being.

Provision for vocational education, work-related learning and curriculum enrichment are good. These are well supported with specialist resources in the school and through appropriate partnerships. Academic subjects are not as strong because the aims for them are not as clear as they are for the other areas of the curriculum and especially in relation to meeting the needs of students with statements. Aspects of care, support and guidance are good, such as the care and concern staff show for students and the positive relationships they encourage. However, while the school tries to persuade students and their parents of the importance of good attendance, the impact has been limited. The arrangements for the transition of students from the special school, especially in obtaining timely, detailed and accurate information on them, are inadequate.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise expectations and improve learning by:
 - rigorous assessment of students' prior attainment and their progress
 - using assessment effectively in setting targets and planning work that is challenging
 - taking steps to develop effective transition arrangements with schools
 - Strengthen teaching by:
 - developing a variety of approaches to increase students' enjoyment and engagement in learning
 - encouraging students' evaluation of their own and other students' progress
 - Improve provision in English, especially in relation to supporting those students who find learning literacy more difficult than most
 - Develop more effective strategies for improving attendance so that persistent absenteeism reduces by 20% within one year
 - Strengthen leadership and management by:
 - making the monitoring and evaluation of the school's work rigorous
 - ensuring that the management committee supports and challenges the school in relation to students' achievement and personal development.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

4

Students struggle to engage in lessons and they apply very little energy to, or have

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much enthusiasm for, their academic work. Levels of attainment vary considerably but, overall attainment is low. In lessons seen, students' learning was inadequate because expectations were often too low and students needed a great deal of persuasion and help to complete tasks, especially in core subjects. The pace of learning was usually too slow as students were reluctant to take sufficient responsibility for their own learning. Moreover, the high level of absence in the group as a whole has an adverse impact on learning and progress throughout the school. The difficulty a significant number of students have in learning literacy skills has only recently been given closer attention, but so far there has been no significant impact of strategies on raising the standard of literacy. For students who do attend, learning is stimulated by the variety of practical, vocational activities on the timetable and they make satisfactory progress in lessons. In carpentry, building an oak pergola, which contains an element of enterprise, creates interest and generated good efforts in cutting mortise and tenon joints. By the end of Year 11, some students make satisfactory progress in gaining A*-G passes in one or more GCSE subjects.

The school helps students to feel safe and adopt a healthy lifestyle. Of the few students who expressed a view, most said they feel safe and are encouraged to consider keeping healthy. While attendance is low, those who come to school regularly enjoy positive relationships with staff and each other, which lead to acceptable behaviour. The practical, creative curriculum and sport are enjoyed and, as these often take place in the community, they help students to contribute positively. This strengthens students' self-confidence, contributing satisfactorily to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	4
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	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
The extent to which pupils feel safe	3
Pupils' behaviour	3
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	3

¹ 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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The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	4
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	4
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

How effective is the provision?

The lack of information on students' prior attainment combined with assessment that is not sufficiently robust result in a failure to promote learning. The assessment of students' attainment and progress is not built systematically enough into planning teaching and is not used skilfully to enhance learning. Much lesson planning, particularly in the core subjects, is insufficiently focused on learning outcomes and does not provide enough opportunities to involve students effectively in evaluating their own and each other's progress. There is not enough variety in the teaching of English and mathematics to give breadth and create interest and enjoyment.

The curriculum is well-tailored to Key Stage 4 students who want to pursue vocational opportunities and experience work-related learning. The school's good specialist facilities, offering a variety of crafts and skills, together with those supplied by partners, give a wide range of positive opportunities. The students who attend regularly are able to make progress in developing vocational and work-related skills. The provision for literacy and that for meeting the needs of students with a statement of special educational needs is inadequate. This has a negative impact on progress and is failing to prepare students sufficiently for their future economic well-being.

Staff are concerned for students' welfare and act positively to keep them safe and encourage a healthy lifestyle. Relationships between staff and students are often positive, which leads to acceptable behaviour. Links with a large number of agencies contribute to a wide range of appropriate support for students and their families. However, the level of resources available to tackle students' absences is insufficient to make a decisive impact on improving persistently low levels of attendance. The links with the special school, from which many students transfer to the Midpoint Centre, are not sufficiently strong to make good transition arrangements for these students.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

How effective are leadership and management?

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The effort invested by leaders in monitoring students' performance lacks the clear aim of measuring their progress accurately. Insufficient priority is also given to interrogating strengths and weaknesses in learning and progress in order to inform improvements in teaching, assessment and the curriculum. Leaders do not set high enough expectations or follow them through with robust testing of how well their expectations are being put into practice. As a result, the monitoring and evaluation of strengths and weaknesses that lead to effective action are weak. The management committee is potentially a powerful body given the large amount of experience and expertise of its members. However committee members are too accepting of the explanations given for students' attainment and their chronic non-attendance. This neither helps to raise expectations nor provides a strong drive for school improvement.

The school keeps in regular contact with parents, keeping them informed through meetings, newsletters and reports. It willingly supports parents where it can, but does not yet have enough parental support in promoting attendance. Partnerships are well developed with community organisations and groups who offer work and activities that increase the relevance of the curriculum and its enrichment. However, partnerships are no better than satisfactory overall because they have not had enough impact on pupils' learning and well-being. All of the school's arrangements for safeguarding students are good. Rigour is applied to checking the suitability of staff and others.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	4
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	4
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	4
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	4
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	4

Views of parents and carers

Few parents and carers returned their questionnaires. The responses that were received

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highlighted strengths such as the school keeping their children safe, teaching, the management of behaviour and leadership and management. On the basis of inspection evidence, inspectors agree students stay safe in school and on trips. Inspectors also agree that students' behaviour is managed appropriately by the school. However, inspection evidence shows that teaching and leadership and management are inadequate. Parents were most concerned about how well their children are prepared for the future and whether or not the school meets their children's particular needs. Inspection evidence points to students not being prepared adequately because not all of those who attend make enough progress and the number of persistent absentees is too high. Evidence also shows that students' literacy difficulties are not being supported effectively.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Midpoint Centre 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 four completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 61 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	2	50	1	25	1	25	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	2	50	2	50	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	2	50	1	25	1	25	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	2	50	1	25	1	25	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	2	50	2	50	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	2	50	1	25	1	25	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	2	50	1	25	1	25	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)	2	50	0	0	1	25	1	25
The school meets my child's particular needs	2	50	1	25	0	0	1	25
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	2	50	2	50	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	2	50	0	0	2	50	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	2	50	2	50	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	2	50	1	25	1	25	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">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
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.



19 March 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of the Midpoint Centre, Wolverhampton, WV6 0UA

Thank you for your welcome when we visited to inspect your school recently and thanks to the students we were able to talk to during the visit. While some things about the school are positive, it needs a great deal of improvement before it can provide you with an adequate standard of education. There is a lot that the school needs to put right and the staff will need support to do this. Inspectors will be visiting regularly to help the school and make sure enough progress is being made on all the necessary improvements.

Here are the positive things we found out about your school.

Staff are caring and concerned you make a success of your last two years in school.

The school is helping you to learn how to stay safe and live a healthy life.

The curriculum provides lots of interesting activities and much that is relevant to what you enjoy and what might help you choose a career.

These are the areas that need to be improved.

The school's expectations should be higher to improve your attendance and your progress.

More needs to be known about what you have learnt before joining the Midpoint Centre to make teaching, learning and assessment effective.

The teaching of English needs to be made effective, especially in helping those of you who find literacy more difficult than most.

School leaders and the management committee need to maintain a rigorous check to ensure the school is doing all it can to help you achieve success.

You can help the school enormously by all making the effort to go to school every day, working hard and being determined to achieve as much as you can. I wish you all the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Alan Lemon

Lead inspector

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