

Alternative Education Service - St Mary's Centre

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	108666
Local authority	South Tyneside
Inspection number	377797
Inspection dates	24–25 January 2012
Lead inspector	Andrew Johnson HMI

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	7–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	19
Appropriate authority	The management committee
Chair	Alan Kerr
Headteacher	Allyson Poole
Date of previous school inspection	3 November 2010
School address	Whitehead Street South Shields NE33 5LZ
Telephone number	0191 424 6204
Fax number	0191 420 5421
Email address	aebss@southtyneside.gov.uk



You can use Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school. Ofsted will use the information parents and carers provide when deciding which schools to inspect and when.

You can also use Parent View to find out what other parents and carers think about schools in England. You can visit www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk, or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



© Crown copyright 2012

Introduction

Inspection team

Andrew Johnson

Her Majesty's Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two working days' notice. The inspector observed eight lessons taught by six teachers and one member of a partner organisation. He spent approximately seven hours in lessons. The inspector talked to students and heard some of them read. Meetings were held with members of the management committee, a representative of the local authority, a parent and members of staff. He took account of the responses to the questionnaires returned by nine parents or carers, 11 staff and 15 students. He looked at the online questionnaire (Parent View); however, no responses were present to be viewed. Other aspects of the work of the school were examined and a visit was made to another site where students are taught. Documents were scrutinised, including the self-evaluation document and action plan. Tracking data in reference to academic progress, behaviour and attendance were also analysed.

Information about the school

St Mary's is a small pupil referral unit. It was inspected in November 2010 and given a Notice to Improve. It provides education for students who have either been permanently excluded from mainstream schools or who are at risk of being so. In the main this is due to their poor behaviour or persistent absence. The majority enter the school in Key Stages 3 and 4, although a small number of pupils join in Key Stage 1 or 2. There are three core objectives: first, to return students to mainstream schools as quickly as possible; second, if this is inappropriate, to find them suitable alternative provision or special education; or third, for students who join late in their school career, to move them on to a sustained period of further education, employment or training. Alternative provision is provided to students by five partner organisations.

Most students are boys and nearly all are of White British origin. None of the current students had a statement of special educational needs, although five were in the process of assessment. A high proportion of students are known to be eligible for free school meals. Due to the short time students spend in the centre it is impossible to measure achievement against the current floor standard.

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	3
Achievement of pupils	3
Quality of teaching	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils	3
Leadership and management	3

Key Findings

- In accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement.
- The overall effectiveness of St Mary's has improved and is satisfactory. It meets its core purpose of improving behaviour, attendance and attitudes, so that most students move on and improve their life chances. Some weaknesses remain but the centre is going in the right direction at a good rate.
- Most students spend less than a year at St Mary's and move on to an appropriate destination. Students trust staff and feel safe. The atmosphere in the centre is usually calm. The exclusion rate is much reduced and incidents of poor behaviour are far less frequent than at the time of the previous inspection. Despite this, a minority of students still need to develop more consistent and respectful social behaviours.
- The annual attendance rate is below average. However, this statistic does not tell the full story. A significant minority of students are registered at the centre having refused to attend school for long periods. The centre does all it can to re-engage these students and works hard with parents and carers. Attendance rates have improved significantly, both for individuals and overall.
- Almost all students join the centre with very low attainment in English and mathematics. Most make progress in line with expectations and those who attend regularly often do better than that. However, given their low starting points and the short time they spend in the centre, this does not make up for previous underachievement and almost all leave with standards of attainment well below those typical for their age.
- The quality of teaching is satisfactory. Staff gain students' confidence and their attitude to learning improves. However, due to an insufficiently personalised approach to learning, academic progress is often satisfactory rather than good. Parents and carers are satisfied with the quality of teaching.

- Leadership and management are satisfactory. The inadequate achievement of students at the time of the previous inspection has improved and is now satisfactory. The use of measurable outcomes to track students' progress has improved and provides teachers and managers with an accurate picture. However, a few significant weaknesses remain. In particular, the management of teaching and learning has not resulted in consistently good practice.

Schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the impact teaching has on academic progress by:
 - personalising the tasks given to students to allow them to work at an appropriate pace and level
 - increasing the amount of time students have to practise their independent learning skills without the constant support of staff
 - ensuring the development of literacy and numeracy is a key aspect of learning across all subjects.
- Improve the impact of the management of teaching by:
 - revising the criteria used to judge the quality of teaching and increasing the focus on learning rather than teacher activity
 - accurately evaluating the work of the centre and linking this to a concise and challenging development plan.
- Improve students' social and moral development by:
 - increasing their ability to cope with the demands of a typical mainstream classroom
 - ensuring students develop appropriate and consistent levels of respect for adults that better equip them for the world of work.

Main Report

Achievement of pupils

Achievement is satisfactory and improving. The inspector observed students making broadly satisfactory progress in the development of skills, knowledge and understanding. This varied significantly between lessons; inadequate progress is very rare and there are examples of good learning.

Almost all of the current students have been at the centre for less than a year. The target average length of stay is 14 weeks. Examination of students' books and tracking records indicate the majority are making satisfactory or better progress.

Last year 31 students left the centre. They all made appropriate moves to mainstream schools, special educational provision, further education or employment.

The attainment of students who leave at the end of Year 11 is very low in comparison to that expected of most students. For example, no students left with five good grades at GCSE and only 77% attained a GCSE pass of any kind. However, almost all left with a qualification of some sort, which for most was the first recognition of academic achievement.

The centre's assessment data show that students enter with very low-level literacy and numeracy skills. Those who attend on a regular basis make at least the expected progress, and sometimes it is good. Students who are persistently absent make much less progress. Pupils in Key Stage 2 generally make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics due to the intensive one-to-one support they receive. There are significant differences in the levels of progress made in Key Stages 3 and 4. For example, in Key Stage 4 students make better progress in English than they do in mathematics, but in Key Stage 3 this pattern is reversed. Much of this inconsistency is a result of the constantly changing cohorts of students.

Parents and carers recognise that the centre has a positive impact on students' achievement and it is much improved in comparison to their previous experience.

Quality of teaching

The quality of teaching is satisfactory. Teachers and teaching assistants are very patient and highly skilled at developing a good rapport with students. This means that students are willing to learn and take part in tasks. For example, in one lesson a younger student relished the opportunity to read about why life is hard for a goldfish and in another a student developed a good understanding of life in Brazil.

Students' work is marked regularly. Comments in books direct students to how they can improve. However, students do not always respond to these comments. Teachers question students to test their understanding but sometimes they do not give them enough time to answer. In some lessons students spend too much time simply following instructions rather than thinking for themselves. Teachers sometimes measure success against the completion of a task rather than the development of understanding.

Accurate initial assessment takes place to identify students' levels of prior attainment and learning needs. This information is then recorded on appropriate individual education plans. However, teachers do not always personalise learning to meet the needs and interests of individuals. Class sizes are very small but teachers often plan lessons in which all the students work on exactly the same material at the same pace. The intensive support students receive ensures that they are kept on task and, given their previous history, this is very important. However, at times, due to the constant support students receive, they are not able to develop as independent learners or prepare for the demands of mainstream education. Teaching has a satisfactory impact on students' social and cultural development. The curriculum is satisfactory and well focused on the development of literacy and numeracy skills, although in different subjects there is a lack of emphasis placed upon the development of these skills. Parents and carers are satisfied with the quality of provision.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The atmosphere was calm and relaxed during the inspection. Students are compliant and follow instructions. Evidence shows that behaviour is much improved. A caring and sensitive approach ensures that students are well supported. They are carefully inducted into the centre so they feel comfortable and do not have a negative impact on the behaviour of others. The number of fixed-term exclusions has been greatly reduced.

Despite this positive picture, older students' attitudes in lessons often fall below the standards expected in mainstream schools. These incidents are well managed by teachers and support assistants. They nip problems in the bud and usually prevent them from escalating. However, more work needs to be done to enable students to recognise the importance of respect and the likely impact of their attitudes if they were at work or in a less supported situation.

Students say they feel safe and there is no bullying, although name-calling and disagreements do happen, particularly amongst older girls. Parents and carers who returned the questionnaires were happy that their children were kept safe.

Annual attendance levels have improved but remain below average. Strong partnerships exist with specialist agencies and safeguarding is prioritised. Around a third of current students have been referred to the centre as a result of persistent absence over an extended period. Despite the strenuous efforts of the centre to re-engage these students in education several still refuse to attend.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are satisfactory and improving. Managers have successfully addressed all the inadequate areas identified at the previous inspection, including the poor achievement. Their track record indicates a sound capacity to improve. Better partnerships have been developed with local schools and alternative providers. The curriculum is satisfactory overall but better for Year 10 and 11 students due to the alternative provision that acts as a bridge between school and further education or training. The social, moral, cultural and spiritual development of students is satisfactory. Appropriate policies and procedures are in place to promote equality, tackle discrimination and make arrangements for safeguarding. Staff have confidence in leaders and work effectively as a team.

The use of student performance data to set challenging targets for students and the identification of, and support for, those who are at risk of underachieving has contributed strongly to improvement. However, a few weaknesses remain in the evaluation of the work of the centre and the management of teaching. Links between evaluation, planning and target-setting are not clear enough. There is an over-reliance on external advice to measure the quality of teaching. Too much emphasis is placed upon evaluating teaching methods rather than the quality of students' learning. The assessment of the work of the centre lacks rigour. The management committee and local authority provide good support to the centre but are not involved sufficiently in the process of self-evaluation.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all 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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and 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 governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.



26 January 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of Alternative Education Service - St Mary's Centre, South Shields NE33 5LZ

I am writing to let you know what I thought about St Mary's Centre. I think it has improved a lot and is now providing you with a satisfactory quality of education. Many of you have had a bad experience in mainstream education but St Mary's is helping you turn things around. After you've settled in, your behaviour and attendance improve.

Your teachers and the other staff work very hard to keep you on track. From low starting points you make better progress in learning, particularly in reading, writing and mathematics.

The school is always trying to improve and I have tried to help by identifying some things I think they could do better. They are to:

- give you more chances to learn independently in lessons
- continue to improve your attitudes to others, particularly in unfamiliar situations
- improve the way the quality of the centre is measured and how plans are made.

St Mary's provides you with a fresh start and I hope you take that opportunity. If, when you leave the centre, you continue to work hard and enjoy learning I am sure you will go from strength to strength.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Johnson
Her Majesty's Inspector

