

Atkinson House School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	132771
Local Authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	341336
Inspection dates	3–4 November 2010
Reporting inspector	Brian Blake HMI

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 of pupils on the school roll	52
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Elsie Harvey
Headteacher	Mr Richard McGlashan
Date of previous school inspection	5 July 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one additional inspector. Eight part lessons – involving a total of seven teachers – were observed. Inspectors also spent time reviewing the standards of students' work and their progress in learning, as seen in their work books. A range of documents was scrutinised and meetings were held with members of the senior leadership team, members of the governing body, nominated staff and a group of students. Other informal discussions were held with staff and a significant number of students during lessons and around the school. Inspectors also read the inspection questionnaires returned by parents and carers, in addition to considering the views of those staff and students who completed separate questionnaires.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. Inspectors looked in detail at the following.

- The students' attainment in English and mathematics, and their overall progress and achievement.
- The curricular provision, especially the vocational element for the 14 to 16 year olds.
- The quality of care, guidance and support, especially in relation to behaviour and attendance.
- The impact and effectiveness of leadership and management at all levels across the school.

Information about the school

Atkinson House School caters for students with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. A significant number of the students join the school at different times throughout the academic year, having been referred by the local authority from other mainstream schools. All the students have a statement of special educational needs. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is well above average. All students are of White British heritage and come from many different geographical parts of Northumberland. A new building, purpose built for some vocationally oriented and traditional subject areas, opened in September. The school holds a number of awards, among which are Investors in People, the Basic Skills Agency Quality Mark, the Financial Management Standard in Schools (FMSiS), and a local authority award for anti-bullying.

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?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

Atkinson House School provides a satisfactory standard of education for its students.

Although attainment is generally low when compared to the national averages, especially in English and mathematics, the students make satisfactory progress in their learning during their time at the school. The vast majority leave at the end of Year 11 with some form of external accreditation.

The school is very sensitive to the students' background of emotional, social and behavioural difficulties. It provides a range of learning experiences that are aimed at improving their regular attendance, tackling their behavioural outbursts, and helping them to develop into mature young people who can leave the school and find success in the adult world. While this is working for the vast majority, there is a significant minority whose attendance is very poor, and whose achievements do not reflect their capabilities. The recent introduction of the on-site vocational courses, now being taught in a state-of-the-art new building, is showing the early signs of engaging the students more fully in their learning because of the very practical nature of the activities. For example, brick laying, motor mechanics and plastering are just three of the national vocational courses now on offer to some of the students.

Teaching is of a satisfactory quality overall. The school provides targeted learning of the key skills in literacy and numeracy but there is currently insufficient focus on developing and supporting these skills further in all curricular areas. Individual student targets, which are aimed at raising standards, are set regularly. However, these lack sufficient rigour to ensure they are matched accurately against the students' prior attainment. Furthermore, the setting of these targets makes too little use of detailed discussions between teachers and students and teachers do not make sufficient use of this information to ensure that lesson content always accurately matches the range of abilities in the class.

Senior leaders and managers generally know the strengths and areas for development, although the self-evaluation form used for this inspection was overgenerous in a number of important areas because it was insufficiently matched to the inspection criteria. Also, not all staff and governors are as actively involved in identifying, setting and agreeing the priorities that target the actions for future improvements in provision. Links with parents and carers are good. Governors fulfil their statutory duties and the quality of their financial management has been recognised by the award of the FMSiS, which results in the school achieving satisfactory value for money. However, in other aspects of its work, the governing body lacks a clear strategy to monitor and evaluate the work of the school, which makes only for satisfactory capacity to improve further.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve students' attainment and achievement, especially in English and mathematics, by:
 - developing a whole-school curriculum approach to the teaching of the key skills in literacy and numeracy
 - targeting focused support for those students who are underperforming relative to their capabilities.
- Improve target setting as a means of helping to raise standards and improving the students' progress by:
 - using all available student information to set targets, which reflect accurately the capabilities of the students
 - involving the students more in the target setting process
 - teachers making more use of these known targets to plan lessons more accurately to meet the varying needs of all the students.
- Improve attendance by:
 - targeting and supporting those students whose regular attendance is poor
 - continuing to work with external partners, especially the local authority, to decrease the proportion of persistent absentees.
- Improve leadership and management by:
 - developing a strategy for monitoring and evaluating the work of the school, which engages all staff and governors on a regular basis
 - ensuring that all staff and governors are involved in the process of identifying the main priorities for improvement.
- Up to 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Although the overwhelming majority of students join the school with low standards, some have a background of attainment much closer to the average levels expected for their age. A number of students go on to achieve some form of accreditation by the time they leave the school but the small minority whose attendance is very poor leave without gaining any significant external awards. For a large majority of the students, their overall achievement is satisfactory relative to their capabilities. For the majority of time, students enjoy being at the school because, as a number said to inspectors, 'The staff do not treat us like children.' Despite this, however, the students' overall attendance is below average, as it has been since the previous inspection. The recently opened vocational centre now provides school-based opportunities for a range of practical subjects that are clearly helping to engage the students by raising their levels of enjoyment, while improving their general demeanour and attitudes towards staff and peers. These qualities are seen in other parts of the school also, but there remains a significant minority whose challenging

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behaviour disrupts their own and others' learning in lessons. The majority of students do make gains in improving their behaviour, attitudes to learning and in their regular attendance at the school, three aspects which have previously caused them to underperform. Students show satisfactory levels of concentration in lessons. The vast majority of students acquire key literacy and numeracy skills in preparation for the next stage of their education. Standards, although still low, are improving slowly.

A large majority of the students say they feel safe in school, with around 84% of those who completed the inspection questionnaire confirming this view. The school actively promotes the well-being of its students including eating healthily and engaging in regular exercise through planned physical education lessons.

Students' spiritual, moral, social and culture development is satisfactory overall. Students know the difference between right and wrong, although they do not always choose to follow the right path. Students generally show satisfactory social skills when working in whole-class plenary sessions or in smaller groups. A minority of the students find some aspects of classroom practice personally challenging, which can result in an inability to listen carefully enough to the teacher or others who may be answering a question. The planned provision for cultural development, including the study of world faiths, is good. Together with some external visits, provision ensures that the students are beginning to appreciate that there are many different and contrasting communities outside of those at the school or their home.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
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
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	4
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	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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How effective is the provision?

Teachers' planning is generally detailed in terms of what will be taught but there is, however, less information about the intended learning outcomes for the students. The best planning is seen in accredited courses, where teachers make good use of nationally published syllabuses. The use of ongoing assessment information for monitoring the students' progress is satisfactory. However, teachers currently do not make enough use of the targets set for the students as a means of informing future planning and lesson content, both of which need to take better account of the known capabilities of the students. Teachers make use of regular assessments about behaviour and attendance as part of the reward system in the school. Those students who spoke with inspectors were very positive about this aspect, indicating that they enjoyed some of the reward choices offered on a Friday afternoon as a result of achieving a 'good score' for their work over the course of the week. Teachers generally relate well to the students, all of whom have a wide range of varying emotional, social and behavioural needs. The large majority of working relationships between students and adults in the school is good. Teachers and support assistants talk with the students in a considered and careful manner, most often appropriate to the moods and emotions of the students. The additional adult support in lessons works well and the students show high levels of confidence when working with these support assistants. Teachers' marking is satisfactory. Where it is best, teachers provide succinct comments about the effort and quality of the work produced which, if of a high enough standard, includes a sticker for the personal achievements made. Teachers use questioning satisfactorily, although there are occasions when it is a little too closed and fast to engage fully all the students in the class.

The curriculum meets the needs of the students satisfactorily. The recent developments in the vocational strand of the school's provision is good and is now providing greater choice and flexibility of accreditation opportunities for the older students. The students were full of praise for these areas of learning. For many, acquiring new practical skills and gaining experience in work-related activities is helping to raise their levels of enjoyment and helping them to control and improve their behaviour in lessons.

Parents and carers, responding in the inspection questionnaire, recognise and praise the support and care provided for their children. Staff are sensitive to the needs of the students, and the school has developed a number of effective strategies for engaging with parents and carers and the students in order to encourage improved participation and attendance at the school; for example, the weekly summary report about the students' work and attitudes that is sent home. There are clear and well used systems for rewards and sanctions, which are well known and used sensibly by staff. While there are systems to deal quickly with those students who need focused support or care, there is no formal mechanism for recording the number of times any one individual student asks to be removed from lessons, for whatever reason.

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These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

How effective are leadership and management?

School development planning is satisfactorily based on identified areas for improvement, but there is a lack of clarity about the extent to which these are prioritised and agreed by all senior leaders and managers, including governors, and the staff. A regular programme of termly lesson observations by senior managers of all teachers in the school provides helpful information about classroom practice. However, it lacks specific focus on those key aspects that will help improve all outcomes for the students. Governance, overall, is satisfactory.

Although the school is successfully meeting the varying emotional, social and behavioural needs of its students through its partnerships links with other providers and external specialists, it does not yet formally monitor or evaluate the impact of this or other aspects of its equalities practice. In the last academic year, there were no recorded incidents of racist behaviour at the school.

Safeguarding procedures are satisfactory, and senior leaders and managers are making reasonable efforts to ensure that the students feel safe when in school. Policies that cover all aspects of safeguarding practice are generally satisfactory but there is a lack of clarity about the referral process for staff or parents when there is a concern about a member of staff, including the headteacher.

The school has successfully audited the different home communities of the students. It has responded sensibly to target actions which will help students to gain a greater appreciation that they need to live harmoniously with others, both in their home areas and in the school and its local community.

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These are the grades for leadership and management

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

Views of parents and carers

The overall response rate to the inspection questionnaire was around 39%, which is around average for schools of this type. The vast majority of parents and carers are very positive and supportive of the school. A small number of parents and carers indicated that their children do not enjoy attending school, but they also recognised the role that the school and its staff have played in helping their children to improve their behaviour and achieve more positively than they had done in their previous mainstream schools.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Atkinson House 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 21 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 52 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	9	43	9	43	3	14	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	12	57	7	33	2	10	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	12	57	9	43	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	7	33	12	57	1	5	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	13	62	5	24	1	5	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	11	52	8	38	1	5	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	7	33	11	52	1	5	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)	10	48	6	29	1	5	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	12	57	7	33	1	5	1	5
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	12	57	7	33	0	0	1	5
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	9	43	10	48	1	5	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	11	52	9	43	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	12	57	6	29	1	5	1	5

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 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	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

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 are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

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 pupils' 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.



November 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Atkinson House School, Cramlington, NE23 7EB

On behalf of the inspectors who recently visited your school, may I thank you for the way the vast majority of you behaved during our time in school. I know that some of you found it a little disruptive to have visitors in your lessons but, overall, almost all of you showed the levels of courtesy we expect when visiting schools. We were particularly pleased to have received the parents' and students' questionnaires, all of which have been carefully read and comments noted by the inspection team.

We hope that both you and your parents and carers enjoy reading the following text, in which we summarise our main findings from the inspection.

- Atkinson House School provides you with a satisfactory standard of education.
- Although your standards are low when compared to all other schools, the vast majority of you make satisfactory progress in your learning and almost all who leave the school at the end of Year 11 achieve success in some external course or examination. Well done to those, but some of you are capable of doing much better. We are, therefore, asking the school to help all of you improve further, especially in learning and using those important literacy and numeracy skills that you need in all subjects.
- The large majority of you told us you feel safe in school.
- Your behaviour is mainly satisfactory, although there are some of you whose attitudes and behaviour affect your own and others' learning in lessons.
- The attendance of some of you is good, but there are far too many whose regular attendance at school is very poor. We are, therefore, asking that school works with others to improve the attendance rate for all students at the school.
- The staff are sensitive to your needs, and are using a variety of different methods to keep you motivated and wanting to do the best that you can in all that you study at school.
- Although you have subject targets aimed at helping you to make progress in your learning, these are not always used to best effect by your teachers to plan lessons that make you work to your real abilities. We are asking the school to encourage everyone, including you, to use these targets to help raise standards and enable all of you to achieve your potential.
- The senior staff and governors know what they want to do to help the school get better, but we are asking that everyone in or associated with the school, especially

you, contributes to this process, so that it makes it much easier to know how well the school is really doing.

We hope that you continue to enjoy attending school and that you achieve all that you and your parents or carers wish for the future.

Yours sincerely

Mr Brian Blake

Her Majesty's Inspector

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