

The Alternative Complementary Education (ACE) Service

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	136155
Local Authority	Plymouth
Inspection number	382033
Inspection dates	18–19 October 2011
Reporting inspector	Sarah Mascal

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	4–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	150
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Chair	Maggie Carter
Headteacher	Sarah Gillett
Date of previous school inspection	Not applicable
School address	Palace Court Buckwell Street Plymouth PL1 2DA
Telephone number	01752 267962
Fax number	01752 225276
Email address	ace@plymouth.gov.uk

Age group	4–18
Inspection date(s)	18–19 October 2011
Inspection number	382033

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 educational 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 St](#)
[Manchester](#)
[M1 2WD](#)

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

© Crown copyright 2011



Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors observed teaching and learning in 10 lessons, taught by 10 teachers. The team inspected all nine centres. Meetings were held with the acting chair of the management committee, two other members of the management committee, parents, carers, staff and pupils. Pupils' work, information on progress, safeguarding policies and other documents were evaluated. Discussions were held with pupils from the different centres. Questionnaires from 15 parents and carers, 54 staff and 45 pupils were scrutinised.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- The present levels of attendance and how are they impacting on pupils' achievements.
- The effectiveness of senior leaders in ensuring good practice is consistent in all the centres.
- The effectiveness of the curriculum in providing pupils with the skills to successfully return to mainstream or prepare them for the next stage of their education.
- How teachers ensure that pupils know how well they are doing and what they have to do next.

Information about the school

This is a new pupil referral unit (PRU). The service was officially established in January 2011. The headteacher started in September 2010 and began the task of consolidating provision for pupils educated out of school across Plymouth. There were originally 11 centres which have now been reduced to nine. There have been two formal staff reviews over the last year. There are three secondary centres that work with Key Stages 3 and 4 pupils who have been excluded or are at risk of exclusion; these are presently based at Palace Court, Bretonside, and Manamead centre. There are two primary centres for Key Stages 1 and 2 pupils who have been excluded or are at risk of exclusion; these are based at Thornbury and Ford. There are four centres supporting health and welfare for those students across the full age range provided for, with medical and mental health issues; these are based at Mount Gould Hospital, Derriford Hospital, Plymbridge House and Dover Road. The service also provides home tuition for students who cannot attend school. The service has only just taken on responsibility for those students who are home educated; this provision was not inspected as it is still at a very early stage of development.

A small minority of students have a statement of special educational needs, including for moderate learning difficulties and autistic spectrum disorders. The vast majority of students are from a White British background. A few are in the care of the local authority. At the time of the inspection it was not possible to observe Key Stages 3 and 4 students in lessons as none were on site. Their centres are closing at half term and staff were preparing to move to a refurbished new site in Bretonside. There are no children under the age of five at present on roll with the service.

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

2

Main findings

A considerable amount has been achieved in a short period of time to bring about improvements and, as a result, standards of education are satisfactory and rapidly improving. The headteacher has wasted no time in making clear her vision for the service and her high expectations for both staff and pupils. She is ably supported by an effective leadership team and together they have ensured that change has been managed well. As a result the centres have a clear sense of purpose and there is a good understanding of the strengths and areas for development. This knowledge has been used effectively to bring about improvements, particularly in raising standards in teaching. There were, for example, serious weaknesses identified in some of the centres and these have been quickly addressed. All of these factors, together with appropriate support from the management committee, contribute to the service's good capacity for sustained improvement.

The service has ensured that procedures for care, guidance and support are effective. Policies and procedures have been reviewed and improvements are supporting pupils well in their personal development and ensuring they are safe. Strong partnerships have been established with a range of professionals and this is effectively supporting pupils in many aspects of their learning, health and well-being. The new rewards system is having a positive impact in improving behaviour and pupils clearly value the points system. Behaviour is good and often excellent for pupils in Key Stages 1 and 2 and those in the health and welfare centres. However, evidence shows that it is satisfactory in the Key Stage 3 and 4 centres where behaviour is more variable. Pupils say they feel safe and behaviour is satisfactory overall.

There has been a complete review of the curriculum. This has ensured that planning in all the centres is now secure. More importantly it has resulted in a curriculum that pupils enjoy and which they are 'buying' in to. There is a wide range of activities and vocational courses that they clearly value. The very good range of sporting activities and better awareness of healthy eating ensure that pupils are adopting healthier lifestyles. The good curriculum is having a positive impact for many in getting them back into education and improving attendance. Attendance is average for the large majority of pupils but there are a small minority of pupils in Years 9, 10 and 11 who are not attending regularly enough.

Improvements in teaching are ensuring that pupils are making satisfactory and

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

sometimes good progress in their learning. As a result, achievement is satisfactory overall. Teaching has a number of strengths, particularly in the positive relationships with pupils and the management of behaviour. Occasionally though, staff do not plan effectively for the different needs of pupils in each class. While there are many good examples of detailed feedback to pupils about how well they are doing and what they have to do to improve, this is not yet consistent across all the centres. The progress of individual pupils is monitored closely, ensuring that all have equal access and opportunity to all the service offers. The management committee is appropriately informed about many aspects of the service but in some respects it is not yet fully effective in the level of challenge it provides. The leadership team acknowledges that it needs to provide it with better quality information about pupil performance.

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

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the attendance of the small minority of pupils who are still not attending on a regular basis.
- Improve teaching so that it is consistently good by:
 - ensuring that planning in all lessons takes account of the different needs of the pupils in each lesson
 - ensuring that pupils have a clear understanding of how well they are doing and what they have to do to improve.
- Ensure that the management committee has a clearer overview of pupils' progress within the service in order to provide more effective challenge in this area.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**3**

The attainment of pupils on entry varies from year to year but overall is low. Most have been out of school for long periods of time and this has led to large gaps in their knowledge and understanding. Overall their attainment remains low during the time they attend the service. However, the majority of pupils make at least satisfactory progress except for a small number of pupils in Key Stages 3 and 4 whose progress is affected by their poor attendance. Several make good progress, including a small number of older pupils who achieve passes in GCSEs and other accreditation. The service is aware that not all achieve as well as they are able.

Pupils enjoy the new courses available to them and have gained accreditation, for example, through the Royal Yachting Association. They speak positively about how much they are learning and the practical courses available to them. Pupils in Key Stages 1 and 2 attending the primary centres generally make good progress and achieve well with many successfully returning to their mainstream settings. Pupils in

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

Key Stages 3 and 4 attending the secondary centres make satisfactory progress overall. Provision has improved in the health and welfare settings so that pupils, across a wide age range, are now making at least satisfactory and increasingly good progress because of much improved teaching. Pupils gain good skills in mathematics, for example in plotting co-ordinates on a graph, while younger pupils show their knowledge of number bonds up to 100, using these skills to ‘purchase’ items in class. Pupils’ work reflects a wide range of activities that ensure they develop a satisfactory and occasionally good range of skills in the subjects they study. There is no evidence of any group of pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who are in the care of the local authority, achieving less well than their peers.

Behaviour is satisfactory overall and improving, with examples of good and sometimes outstanding behaviour at some of the centres. The new rewards system has had a positive impact on pupils. A younger pupil was devastated at losing points but cheered up at the thought that he could earn more points in the afternoon if he behaved. Older pupils have generally responded well to the new strategies and feel that behaviour has improved. Pupils clearly recognise the consequences of their behaviour and many work hard to improve.

The vast majority of pupils are responding well to the service’s procedures to improve their attendance. Most now attend because they enjoy all that is offered. However, a very small minority do not yet attend as frequently as they should. The improvements in pupils’ basic and vocational skills together with their rapidly improving attendance and more positive attitudes prepare them appropriately for the world of work.

There are examples of pupils being actively involved in the community. They have raised funds to support the Royal Marines through a textathon and worked in a care home to raise money. There is an active school council and the service has plans to develop this further to enable pupils to have a greater say in how the service is run. Pupils have been involved in publicising anti-bullying and say there is very little bullying and that they feel safe in the centres. They are aware of what constitutes healthy living. Pupils enjoy sport and there is good involvement in the activities offered. Pupils, for example, talked positively about the recent caving activity and the chance to go sailing. The curriculum supports them well in understanding the need to eat healthily and to lead healthy lifestyles.

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

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

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

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	2
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

How effective is the provision?

Teachers' good subject knowledge and their use of questioning support pupils' learning well. In food technology pupils benefit from the teacher's good subject knowledge when learning how to make a herb infusion and why this was better than a shop-bought bouquet garni. There was good questioning to check that pupils understood what they were making and the names of the tools they were using. In an excellent English lesson pupils benefited from high quality planning that ensured each pupil's needs were met and enabled them to develop a very good understanding of parody. Assessment procedures have been strengthened but occasionally lesson planning is not sufficiently secure to ensure that work set for pupils is consistently matched to the wide range of ability in each class. This was evident in a scrutiny of pupils' work which showed pupils at different levels all doing the same task. There are good examples of detailed marking of pupils' work which helps them to understand what they need to do to improve. However, this is not consistent in all subject areas.

The impact of the good curriculum is very evident in the improving progress and rates of attendance of pupils. The curriculum has been developed to provide a far wider range of accreditation and opportunities for pupils to develop their skills. The service is in the process of extending this even further, particularly in terms of vocational courses. Most pupils clearly value the experiences they get in the centres and as a result attend well. There is a good focus on ensuring that each pupil has an individualised curriculum that is relevant to their particular needs. Learning opportunities are well balanced between basic skills in literacy, mathematics, information and communication technology and science and vocational skills. The use of a wide variety of outside providers as well as the good links with local colleges provides pupils with a wide range of experiences. The close links with primary and secondary schools and the strong curriculum are enabling an increasing proportion of pupils to successfully return to mainstream.

Ensuring that care, guidance and support are of good quality has been a priority for the service. Procedures and practice have been reviewed and are effective in

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

supporting pupils to be safe and to access learning. The good links with a range of providers and professionals have ensured that the needs of each individual are supported effectively and are impacting positively in enabling pupils to access learning. Considerable work has been done to help pupils, many of whom have not attended school regularly for some time, to come to their centre more often. There are satisfactory links with parents and carers and the centre acknowledges the need to enhance these. Staff work closely with families, providing regular information about their children’s progress. At times though, hard decisions have been made to ensure they encourage their children to attend regularly.

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	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Strong leadership and the ambition to make this an outstanding service have driven improvements forward at a good rate. There is a clear commitment on the part of staff to provide the best for pupils. Several staff commented on the changes over the last year and how much the service had improved. There is a clear focus on devolving responsibility and staff carry out their roles well. The service has established a range of strategies to support self-evaluation and ensure monitoring of provision is robust. This has brought about a number of improvements. For example, the very variable quality of teaching identified across the centres has been addressed successfully. As a result, the quality of teaching and learning is improving at a good rate. Pupils’ progress is reviewed regularly and closely monitored. Staff are committed to ensure equality of opportunity and inclusion for all. Constantly improving systems ensure that concerns about the progress of individuals are identified and any issues regarding equality of opportunity are addressed.

The management committee has, over the last year, provided considerable support to senior leaders particularly in dealing with staff reviews and redundancies. Members of the management committee recognise, though, the need to have more detailed information regarding pupil performance in order to provide a better level of challenge in this respect. Safeguarding arrangements are good and include robust risk assessments of pupils’ activities. The procedures for checking the suitability of staff are rigorous.

Community cohesion is promoted satisfactorily. The service is raising its profile within the community and has made good use of the local press to highlight pupils’ activities and successes. The very good links with local schools have benefited staff,

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

through sharing good practice, and pupils in returning to mainstream. Secondary headteachers expressed their confidence in the new leadership and the impact the service was having on their pupils. Links are being developed abroad and activities, such as a debate among pupils regarding the Israel/Palestine issue, are raising pupils’ awareness of international issues.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
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	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
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	3

Views of parents and carers

The return to the Ofsted questionnaire was lower than average as a percentage of pupils on roll. Meetings were held with three parents who were very positive about the service and what it had done for their children. Responses to the questionnaire were less positive and there was a small group of parents and carers who were negative about the provision. Inspectors found provision to be at least satisfactory and improving. Few raised written concerns although a very small number with children on the autistic spectrum continuum expressed concerns that the needs of their children were not always being met. There was no evidence during the inspection that the progress of pupils with autistic spectrum disorders was different from their peers.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at The Alternative Complementary Education (ACE) Service 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 15 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 150 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	1	7	8	53	2	13	3	20
The school keeps my child safe	3	20	8	53	2	13	1	7
The school informs me about my child’s progress	6	40	5	33	1	7	2	13
My child is making enough progress at this school	5	33	4	27	3	20	2	13
The teaching is good at this school	5	33	5	33	2	13	2	13
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	5	33	6	40	2	13	2	13
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	4	27	9	60	0	0	1	7
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)	4	27	5	33	2	13	3	20
The school meets my child’s particular needs	5	33	5	33	2	13	3	20
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	4	27	5	33	1	7	4	27
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	4	27	7	47	2	13	2	13
The school is led and managed effectively	4	27	6	40	2	13	2	13
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	6	40	3	20	1	7	4	27

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	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

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 2010 to 08 April 2011 and 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.

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

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

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.

20 October 2011

Dear Pupils



Inspection of The Alternative Complementary Education (ACE) Service, Plymouth PL1 2DA

Thank you so much for being friendly and helpful when we saw you recently in the different centres. We very much enjoyed meeting you and a special thank you to those of you who took time to come into Palace Court to talk to me; also thank you to those who completed questionnaires.

The service is ensuring that you get a satisfactory education which is rapidly improving. Most of you attend regularly and this helps you to make satisfactory progress in your learning. The small number of you who do not attend well are not achieving as well as you could. The curriculum you are offered is good and enables you to have a wide range of experiences. Teaching has lots of strengths, particularly in the positive relationships you have with staff and the support they give you to help you behave.

Your behaviour is mostly satisfactory or better, but at times it is not appropriate. You have a clear understanding of healthy living and are clearly enthusiastic about all the activities you do. It was good to hear how much you are enjoying food technology.

The service is well led and staff are committed to do the best for you. They have lots of information about how well you are doing. We have asked them to make sure that the management committee has a better understanding of how you are all doing at the various centres. We have also asked the service to help a few of you attend more regularly. In order to make teaching even better we have asked teachers to make sure the work is matched to your individual needs and that they make sure you know how well you are doing and what you have to do to improve.

You can help to do even better in your work by always trying your best. Also, those of you who do not attend your centre often enough need to try and improve your attendance.

We wish you all well for the future.

Yours sincerely

Sarah Mascall
Lead inspector

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone **0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.**