



# Alternative Education Service

## Inspection Report

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**Unique Reference Number** 108666  
**Local Authority** South Tyneside  
**Inspection number** 288150  
**Inspection dates** 21–22 September 2006  
**Reporting inspector** Alastair Younger

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

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|---|--------------------------|-------------------------|---|
| <b>Type of school</b>                     | Pupil referral unit      | <b>School address</b>   | c/o Cleadon Park Education Centre<br>Off Park Avenue, Cleadon Park<br>South Shields, Tyne and Wear NE34 8QL |
| <b>School category</b>                    | Pupil referral unit      | <b>Telephone number</b> | 0191 497 5837   |
| <b>Age range of pupils</b>                | 5–16                     | <b>Fax number</b>       | 0191 427 1641   |
| <b>Gender of pupils</b>                   | Mixed                    | <b>Headteacher</b>      | Mrs Carol Marchant  |
| <b>Number on roll (school)</b>            | 77                       |                         |   |
| <b>Appropriate authority</b>              | The local authority      |                         |   |
| <b>Date of previous school inspection</b> | Not previously inspected |                         |   |

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|--------------------------|---|------------------------------------|
| <b>Age group</b><br>5–16 | <b>Inspection dates</b><br>21–22 September 2006 | <b>Inspection number</b><br>288150 |
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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

## Description of the school

This is a complex pupil referral unit serving the whole of South Tyneside, an area of well above average social and economic disadvantage. Pupils range from the age of 5 to 16. Many of them have been permanently excluded from previous schools. Others include those at risk of exclusion, sick, vulnerable, anxious or phobic children, pregnant schoolgirls and young mothers. Attainment on entry is usually low and attendance in the term prior to admission has often been low to non-existent. Above average numbers of pupils have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Nearly all pupils are of White British origin. The timing of the inspection coincided with the period when numbers on roll are at their lowest. The population fluctuates from day-to-day but increases as the year goes on, often doubling over the course of the year. The service has grown and changed significantly since the last inspection. The accommodation on all seven sites has serious shortcomings.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

This is a good service offering good value for money. Good leadership and management have ensured that good improvements have been made since the last inspection. The service achieves a good degree of success in its aim of preparing pupils for return to school or transition to adult life. It does this by strongly promoting the personal development and well-being of pupils through good care, guidance and support. This includes outstanding monitoring and assessment of personal development. High quality reports on pupils greatly contribute to close, effective working with mainstream schools, parents and the many agencies involved in child and adolescent welfare. This cooperation, usually with the full involvement of pupils, makes a good contribution to their safety and health.

A few pupils, particularly young mothers and sick children, attain standards at or slightly above average but in the main standards are well below average when compared with all schools. Teaching and learning are good so pupils who establish a regular pattern of attendance usually make good progress. The assessment of pupils' academic progress is less well developed than for their personal development. However, many pupils do not overcome their aversion to school and their frequent absence means that, taking all pupils into account, progress and achievement are satisfactory. Although absence is high, most pupils make progress in improving their attendance. The exceptions to this are pupils towards the end of Year 11. Most pupils say they prefer this provision to their mainstream schools and some are very reluctant to return. They are glad that, sometimes for the first time in years, they are achieving success, their future prospects are improving and that this is being recognised.

The service plans well for the future but inadequate accommodation remains a major barrier to further improvement. None of the sites has any specialist facilities for science, design and technology, art or music and only one has suitable facilities for physical education. This seriously limits learning opportunities in those areas of the curriculum that pupils often find the most stimulating and limits opportunities for progress and achievement in those subjects. The service compensates for its poor accommodation by making good use of facilities in the community. This often opens up good opportunities for pupils to contribute well to local projects.

### What the school should do to improve further

- Work closely with the local authority to bring about long overdue and urgently needed improvements to the accommodation.
- Pursue improvements in attendance by making the Key Stage 4 curriculum more enticing with opportunities for pupils to leave with appropriate accreditation and having experienced life in the workplace.
- Improve pupils' academic progress by setting clearer individual targets against which progress can be accurately measured.

## Achievement and standards

### Grade: 3

Achievement is satisfactory. Progress in relation to individual expectations and circumstances is often good for pupils who attend well, because teaching and learning are good. However, there is a large group of pupils, mainly in Year 11, who do not achieve enough because they do not attend. The achievement of different groups has less to do with gender or other category than the reason for or age of referral. Pregnant schoolgirls, young mothers, phobics and those with emotional and social difficulties often achieve best. This is because their attendance is better as they are less encumbered with previous failure and behavioural difficulties than many of the other pupils. The national standard in English and mathematics is usually the level expected by the end of Key Stage 1 and 2. Very few pupils reach it. Last year two Year 9 pupils attained the level expected of Year 6 pupils in English. It must be borne in mind that many pupils have not had much time here to benefit from the good teaching of service staff before their tests and assessments. Last year 41 Year 11 pupils gained a total of 151 GCSE passes. Nearly all of these were at lower levels but these are still satisfactory results for this group of pupils. Nevertheless, many pupils left without a formal qualification in English. The school has responded well to this by introducing more appropriate accreditation for lower attaining pupils.

Poor accommodation limits achievement. The lack of on-site facilities for investigative science, practical subjects and physical education seriously limits progress despite the good, imaginative efforts of teachers to overcome the failings.

## Personal development and well-being

### Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good, as is their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Behaviour quickly improves. Serious incidents still occur occasionally but usually in moments of individual crisis. Because they are well handled by staff they rarely compromise the safety of others. Generally, there is a good atmosphere on each site and most pupils say they enjoy attending because they recognise that staff are genuinely trying to help them sort out their problems. Teenage mothers and primary age pupils attend particularly well. In Key Stage 4, especially Year 11, attendance falls well below the national average, and reduces attendance for the whole service to about 65%. The service tries hard, with good support from the school nurse, to promote healthy lifestyles. It achieves moderate success in breaking down deeply entrenched habits. The lack of outdoor areas on some sites and physical education facilities on all but one add to the problem. Pupils make a good contribution to the community. They contribute well to discussions about improving the service and older pupils participate in environmental projects and the production of equipment for local nurseries. They also entertain senior citizens and offer help in residential homes. By learning how to get on better with other people, pupils are taking a step towards future economic well-being but this is lessened by the numbers of Year 11 pupils leaving without qualifications in basic skills.

## Quality of provision

### Teaching and learning

#### Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good. In lessons, teaching is predominantly good or better. The service is not always able to recruit teachers with the necessary subject skills and desired experience with particular groups of pupils. When teachers are teaching their specialist subjects their understanding is very good and most lessons are effective. Lessons taught by non-specialists tend to be less effective but good leadership and management keep these to a minimum. The sensitive way that teachers react with pupils has a huge bearing on the formation of harmonious relationships and pupils' willingness to work hard. It also contributes greatly to the settled nature of most lessons which allows pupils to concentrate on learning. A weakness of teaching is that some lessons lack appropriate challenge for all pupils. This is partly because a few teachers do not always identify what pupils should learn next based on what they already know. As a result, not all pupils are able to work with a similar degree of independence, lower attaining pupils feeling overwhelmed and higher attaining pupils bored.

### Curriculum and other activities

#### Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory. It is limited by inadequate accommodation. The primary curriculum is good. The need for specialist accommodation is much reduced for this age group. A good focus on English and mathematics, and a good balance of other subjects greatly helps pupils to return successfully to school. This is also the case with the Key Stage 3 curriculum but here it is weakened by the lack of specialist facilities. This reduces the enjoyment factor of subjects such as science. It also reduces opportunities for pupils to achieve more in subjects such as art, design and technology and physical education. The Key Stage 4 curriculum is satisfactory. It includes a good range of subjects, including English, mathematics and science to which are added college placements, outdoor education and environmental studies. Individual pupil's timetables do not fully reflect their aspirations or personal choices. The limited range of opportunities for pupils to achieve accreditation and to be involved in extended periods of workplace learning does little to entice lower attaining or more vocationally minded pupils to attend.

### Care, guidance and support

#### Grade: 2

The quality of care, guidance and support is good. Care is taken to safeguard pupils through safe recruitment of staff and rigorous attention to health and safety and risk assessment. Frequent, valuable consultation between the many parties and organisations involved in the pupils' often complicated lives greatly contributes to pupils' care. The service leaves no stone unturned in its bid to improve attendance.

Pupils are kept well informed about their future options, including the possibility of returning to school or choosing a job. Checking and assessing pupils' personal development is exceptional. It greatly enhances the quality of support and guidance given to pupils and the way their progress is reported to schools and parents. Academic support and guidance is satisfactory. Pupils struggling with their learning are given good support in class but the results of tests and checks of progress are not used effectively enough to set clear academic targets against which progress can be measured more accurately.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

Leadership and management are good. Rapid expansion and diversification have been handled well by senior managers and the service is due a period of consolidation for which it is well prepared. The headteacher maintains a good overview of the service through frequent visits to the sites and through well-established lines of communication with managers and staff. The quality of teaching is thoroughly monitored but does not always place sufficient emphasis on pupils learning. This weakens self-evaluation. The management committee is kept well informed about the service's development and performance. They are good, critical friends but have limited involvement in self-evaluation. Parents, pupils and all other stakeholders have a good, strong voice in helping managers to evaluate the effectiveness of the service. Local schools voice strong support for the help they receive. Costs and resources are carefully managed to ensure that the service gives good value for money. In a service such as this, statutory responsibility rests with the local authority and not the management committee. In this situation more could and should be done to upgrade the accommodation, which has been a barrier to improvement for the past two Ofsted inspections and remains so on the third. All other weaknesses identified by previous inspections have been systematically and effectively remedied.

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## Inspection judgements

|   |                       |
|---|-----------------------|
| Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate | <b>School Overall</b> |
|---|-----------------------|

### Overall effectiveness

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| <b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b> | 2   |
| How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?  | 2   |
| The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation  | 3   |
| The capacity to make any necessary improvements  | 3   |
| Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection   | Yes |

### Achievement and standards

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>How well do learners achieve?</b>   | 3 |
| The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners   | 4 |
| How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners | 3 |
| How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress                              | 3 |

### Personal development and well-being

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>                           | 2 |
| The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development                                     | 2 |
| The behaviour of learners   | 2 |
| The attendance of learners  | 4 |
| How well learners enjoy their education   | 2 |
| The extent to which learners adopt safe practices   | 2 |
| The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles   | 3 |
| The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community                                    | 2 |
| How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being | 3 |

### The quality of provision

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?</b>          | 2 |
| <b>How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?</b> | 3 |
| <b>How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?</b>   | 2 |

<sup>1</sup> Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

## Leadership and management

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| <b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>                                       | 2   |
| How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education | 2   |
| How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets   | 3   |
| How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can                     | 2   |
| How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money  | 2   |
| The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities  | 3   |
| Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?  | Yes |
| Does this school require special measures?   | No  |
| Does this school require a notice to improve?  | No  |

## **Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Alternative Education Service

c/o Cleadon Park Education Centre

Off Park Avenue

Cleadon Park

South Sheilds

Tyne and Wear

NE34 8QL

24 September 2006

Dear all

I popped in last week to have a good look at how you were getting on. Sorry I didn't get to see you all but thanks to those of you who spared some time to talk to me. It really helped me to make up my mind about how good the service is.

I agree with you in thinking the Alternative Education Service is good. I think it is helping you to get back into school or, for when this is unrealistic, helping you to make sensible decisions about your futures.

I'm sorry that the buildings in which you are taught are so hopelessly inadequate. It's not right and I've said so in my report. You deserve better. Most of you haven't fitted in at school for one reason or another but having seen you behave well, be friendly and happy tells me how much the service is helping you towards a better future. Your teachers are good and most of you have a good timetable but I think that in Year 11 you should have more say in what you study and be given more opportunities to experience what real work is all about. I also think it's important that the service checks up on your learning as thoroughly as it does on your behaviour and attitudes.

Lastly, could you make sure you attend whenever you can and get your friends to do the same? There are adults there offering good support and trying to help you and they can't if you don't turn up.

Good luck all of you, be reassured that staff want to help you.

Alastair Younger

Lead Inspector