

Ashdale Centre

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	134346
Local Authority	Middlesbrough
Inspection number	317667
Inspection dates	19–20 September 2007
Reporting inspector	Christine Graham HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools the authority to cause any school to be inspected. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Pupil referral unit
School category	Pupil referral unit
Age range of pupils	14–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	33
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Headteacher	Ms Helen Whitehead
Date of previous school inspection	1 March 2006
School address	Marton Road Middlesbrough TS4 3RX
Telephone number	01642 354352
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Age group	14-16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors.

Description of the school

When The Ashdale Centre was inspected in March 2006, it was judged to require special measures. It was monitored by HMI in September 2006 and in January and April 2007.

The Ashdale Centre is a pupil referral unit. It provides an education for Key Stage 4 students who have been permanently excluded from school. Some students are school refusers and a very high proportion have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Five students have a statement of educational need. All students have suffered considerable disruption to their education. Most students are of White British heritage. Approximately 80% of students are eligible for free school meals and almost all are from the most disadvantaged areas of Middlesbrough. Nearly a quarter of students are involved with the youth offending service. The majority of students join the centre from the Key Stage 3 pupil resource unit and a small number have attended the Key Stage 2 provision. A new teacher-in-charge was appointed in January 2007. The centre recently gained a Healthy School Award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

In accordance with section 13(4) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that the centre no longer requires special measures. It has tackled the issues from the last inspection and has improved the provision made for students. The Ashdale Centre now provides students with a satisfactory education.

Students who are placed in the centre are amongst the most vulnerable in Middlesbrough. Many have problems with drugs or alcohol and some are involved in criminal activities or anti-social behaviour. Most are very disaffected and have very poor attendance. A number have been excluded from more than one school and as a result have missed a great deal of their education. On entry the attainment of most students is well below that which might be expected for their age and even the most able have significant gaps in their understanding, skills and knowledge. Some students have difficulty in managing their behaviour. Most students lack self-confidence and self-esteem which affects their learning. All have experienced difficulty in their previous schools. The centre's main aim is the successful transition of students from Key Stage 4 into full-time education, training or employment. In order to achieve this staff focus on improving the social skills of students, raising their confidence and self-esteem and giving them the skills to work with people in different contexts. The centre successfully meets its aims.

Because of the good care and support they receive, most students make at least satisfactory progress during their time at the centre. The attendance of all but the most hard to reach improves, as does their ability to respond to the needs of others. They learn how to communicate appropriately in different situations and how to manage their behaviour. They are taught how to budget and to prepare simple but nutritious meals. Similarly their health needs are effectively met. As a result the self-confidence of most students increases and some begin to recognise and build upon academic and personal success. Students are very well looked after and very effective arrangements to keep them safe are in place.

Students receive good social and moral guidance but academic guidance is not effective enough. Targets are set for attendance and achievement but tracking and assessment is not always rigorous enough to ensure that these are achieved. Students are responding well to the reward system and are beginning to use the guidance provided to decide their level of success during each lesson. Some seem particularly pleased by the introduction of achievement assemblies.

Attainment is rising. In 2007, all students who attended regularly gained externally recognised qualifications. The number of students gaining Level 1 qualifications rose significantly. A small number of students achieved Level 2 qualifications and a much greater proportion achieved the highest grades at GCSE than had done so previously. However, a small number are so disaffected that despite the best efforts of the centre they fail to attend or do not attend regularly enough. Some of the most able students do not attain as much as they should given their achievements at 11 and 14. The centre cannot provide some of the specialist teaching or resources which would be needed for the most able to take examinations in the full range of subjects. Although transition rates to college courses are good, re-integration rates to mainstream schools are poor.

Teaching is satisfactory overall and some lessons are good. Teachers plan lessons carefully and the organisation of learning and pace of teaching are much improved. Many students lack effective learning skills and some are easily disheartened by advice or constructive criticism.

However, Year 11 students are now much more willing to apply themselves to work in the core subjects. They improve or re-draft their work and engage in constructive dialogue with their teachers. For the first time students are not only achieving but also actively enjoying their work.

The curriculum is good and has a number of strengths. Students are taught English, mathematics, science, ICT (information and communication technology), drama, food technology and PE. There are no specialist teaching rooms or resources within the centre so practical lessons have to be taught off site in the Key Stage 3 unit. Provision for vocational education is good and there are opportunities for work-based learning. Vocational choices are matched to the needs and interests of students and to the local labour market. The very good individual support given to students on college courses means that they attend regularly and many make very good progress. The provision for personal, social and moral education is very good. This helps students to value themselves and develop self-confidence and self-esteem.

Leadership is good. The recently appointed teacher-in-charge has an accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses of the centre. In a relatively short space of time, improvements have been made to teaching and learning and to the personal and social development of students. Staff roles and responsibilities have been restructured and staff are very positive about the improved organisation of the centre. The behaviour and attitudes of students are much improved and students and their parents feel that the staff listen to their opinions and act upon them. School self-evaluation is accurate and detailed. Plans made to improve the centre identify the most important issues and how improvements will be made. The centre is well supported by the management committee and the local authority (LA) However, too much of the responsibility for improvement currently lies with the senior leadership team. Capacity for further improvement is good. The centre provides satisfactory value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise the attainment of the most able.
- Use assessment data and student tracking information more effectively.
- Improve re-integration rates.
- Develop middle leadership roles and responsibilities.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Achievement is satisfactory and standards are inadequate. The attainment of students on entry is well below that expected for their age because most have suffered considerable disruption to their education. However, most students who attend regularly make satisfactory or better progress. Their personal, social and communication skills improve as do the basic skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT. In 2007 all students who attended regularly left the centre with at least one nationally recognised qualification. Some achieved a great deal more. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve as well as other students. Nearly 70% of the Year 11 students who left the centre in 2007 are now in education, training or employment. A parent commented that when her son joined Ashdale she thought it was 'the end of the world'. She now thinks it was the best thing which could have happened because her son is working

towards qualifications which will help him to get a job he wants and will enjoy. She believes that he is a 'different boy' because of the help he has received at Ashdale.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

The personal development and well-being of students are satisfactory. The behaviour of some students is very good and even the most recent arrivals accept the rules of the centre. Staff deal very effectively and promptly with any difficulties that occur and students are helped to resolve matters positively. Attendance is much improved and the centre has effective systems in place to deal with poor attendance and to support students and their families. Some students have a long history of non-attendance that begins well before they join the centre. Despite the best efforts of staff and the education welfare service, a small number find it impossible to re-engage with the education system. Far fewer students are excluded from the centre than in previous years because the 'gang culture' has been eradicated and any incidents that do occur are much less serious. Students talk easily with each other and staff. They communicate their feelings appropriately and many are very courteous. They manage complex timetables and other arrangements and are becoming increasingly independent. Increasing numbers of students are involved in decision-making and some older students acted as mentors to the new Year 10. Students have higher expectations of themselves and some have an increasing sense of pride in their work and in the centre. Although they are encouraged to eat healthily, they do not always do so. However, the new system of hot meals is very popular. Students are given help to tackle addictions to smoking, drugs or alcohol and some have one-to-one support. They no longer boast about unacceptable behaviour. Most of the current Year 11 students enjoy their education, possibly for the first time in their lives.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Classrooms are purposeful and welcoming and staff focus on teaching and helping students to learn. Lessons are carefully planned to meet the needs of individuals and teachers explain new ideas carefully creating many opportunities for students to talk about their work. Teachers use questioning well to promote understanding and to identify and deal with gaps in previous knowledge. Students now contribute in lessons. They complete work and ask for help when they need it. All students will now work independently and have the confidence to tackle work they think is difficult. In a few lessons teachers rely on undemanding worksheets. While these help students to learn they do little to promote enjoyment. Students say that they prefer practical lessons and the attitudes and behaviour of most students are exemplary during practical activities. In the best lessons students are challenged and receive accurate feedback on how to improve their work. This is managed very effectively and tactful help and support help these students produce work which is an accurate reflection of their ability. Support staff are very effective. They provide unobtrusive help and support and do much to improve the progress made by individual students. ICT is used effectively in all subjects and to support work at home. Interactive media projects, also known as iMedia, have been particularly successful and students have produced some outstanding work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good. All core subjects are taught and an appropriate amount of time is spent on personal development and activities designed to prepare students for life after school. The opportunities for vocational training are a strength of the centre and for the first time students can benefit from work-based learning, including working at a local special school. Provision for PE has been considerably strengthened this year offering a range of activities including dance, games and the opportunity to play for a football team. All students are taught drama in order to improve speaking and listening skills. The centre has very effective partnerships with other agencies including Connexions. Most students receive 25 hours of education a week. Some are supported back into education on a part-time timetable but this is regularly reviewed and where necessary the number of hours are increased. Although there are no after school activities seven students attended a two-week summer school held at the centre. There are plans to continue holiday activities during the current year.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Care and support are good and guidance is satisfactory. Students are well cared for and supported and this helps them progress well. However, although all staff encourage students to complete work very few tell their students how to improve. There is too little detailed guidance available for students to help them close the gaps in their knowledge and understanding. There are good transition arrangements for students joining the centre from the Key Stage 3 provision and an effective system to assess attainment on entry. Systems for tracking the progress made by individual students are in place but some assessments are not yet undertaken regularly enough to provide secure evidence of improvement.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The teacher-in-charge provides very effective leadership. She has a realistic view of what has been achieved and what remains to be done and has given the staff a common sense of purpose. She has ambitious but realistic plans for the centre. Self-evaluation is accurate and robust. Challenging targets are set for attendance, achievement and the reduction in exclusions. Information about the centre is monitored on a daily and weekly basis and swift and decisive action is taken where necessary. Staff have a good understanding of their role in the improvement process and all understand the school improvement plan. The teacher-in-charge is very well supported by her deputy and together they form a very skilled team. The local authority and the Management Committee have provided very good support for the centre. The Complementary Education Service is currently being restructured and this has delayed the appointment of permanent staff to the centre. As a result, there is little middle management and too much responsibility lies with the senior leadership team.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

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

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ 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

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

The quality of provision

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

¹ 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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
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	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
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

Dear Students

Inspection of The Ashdale Centre, Middlesbrough, TS4 3RX

Thank you for being so helpful when I visited the centre. As you know when Ashdale was inspected, in March 2006, the inspection team felt that it did not give students a good enough education and it was placed in special measures. I have been visiting the centre to check that it was improving and that you are getting a good education. I have always enjoyed visiting Ashdale but I particularly enjoyed my last visit because I could see such a difference in you. Many of you now enjoy school. You behave well and talk sensibly to each other and the staff. I noticed how polite you are. Most people say please and thank you whenever they ask for something. You have positive attitudes towards your work and most of you accept the rules of the centre. Most of you deal sensibly with problems and then get on with your work. I am very pleased to see this because I do not want you to miss out on any more of your education.

Those of you on college courses or other types of training are getting really good opportunities to prepare for life after school. I am very impressed by the people who are trying so hard with their exam coursework or their college work. I was particularly pleased that some people were prepared to improve their work even when they had made a great deal of effort and thought it was OK. A few students have not attended any school for a long time. I wish they could see that they are missing valuable opportunities to learn. You are doing well because the staff look after you very well. They work with other people to make sure you get the help and support you need and they listen to your views and those of your parents so that they can make things even better. Many of you have had difficulties in your lives and as a result you do not expect enough of yourselves. Some of you still have very little confidence. However, I think that you are as capable as other people your age. So I want the staff to make sure you all achieve as much as you can. This means they will have to check on your progress and make sure that you reach the targets that are set for you. Some of you stay in Complementary Education for a long time. This may be the right thing for some of you but not for everyone. Finally, the people in charge have a lot to do so I would like other staff to be further involved in managing the centre.

I am delighted to tell you that Ashdale is no longer in special measures. Congratulations to all of you and the best of luck for the future.

Best wishes

Christine Graham, HMI