

The Alternative Centre for Education

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114678
Local Authority	Brighton and Hove
Inspection number	338421
Inspection dates	3–4 February 2010
Reporting inspector	Sarah Mascall

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	7–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	87
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Fiona Johnson
Headteacher	Mark Whitby
Date of previous school inspection	20 March 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 14 lessons and observed 14 teachers, spending the large majority of their time looking at learning. Meetings were held with governors, staff and students. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at its procedures and policies for safeguarding children, records of students' progress and the nine questionnaires returned by parents and carers.

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

- how well the school uses information about its students to ensure that all make the progress they are capable of
- the use of assessment by teachers to ensure work is matched to students' abilities
- the effectiveness of the curriculum in enabling students to successfully return to the mainstream
- the effectiveness of the school's partnerships in supporting other schools in managing students' behaviour.

Information about the school

The Alternative Centre for Education (ACE) is comprised of:

- a school for students with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties based in Queensdown Road (students aged from 11 to 16)
- a primary centre based in Bavant Road (pupils aged from 7 to 11)
- a secondary pupil referral unit based in Dyke Road (students aged from 11 to 16)
- a tuition centre based at Sellaby House (students aged from 11 to 16)
- a behaviour support service that supports students up to the age of 16 in mainstream schools.

The overwhelming majority of students attending ACE have a history of significant disruption to their learning because of their behavioural and emotional difficulties. Many have missed education through truancy and/or exclusions. Since the last inspection the needs of students have become more complex, displaying more extreme and on occasions aggressive behaviours.

Nearly all students are from White British backgrounds and there are none who speak English as an additional language. There is a very small number of girls attending the centres.

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?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

ACE is a good school because it meets the needs of its students well. The strong leadership of the principal, supported by an effective senior leadership team, results in a school that is very clear about its purpose and very committed to supporting the young people in its care. The excellent partnerships with outside agencies and the very high quality support given to mainstream schools have enabled many students to return to mainstream or, in a number of cases, remain in their schools.

A particular strength of the school is the excellent systems for care, guidance and support which provide 'wrap-around care' for every student. All staff know students extremely well and considerable attention is paid to the needs of each individual. The excellent strategies for care and welfare enable students to feel safe and, as a result, many make good and, on occasions, outstanding progress in their personal development. Many students successfully develop their skills in managing their behaviour and this results in behaviour being good overall. This, together with the good progress they make in their learning, prepares students well for their next stage of education, training or employment. The curriculum is well planned in all the centres and supports teaching well. A strength of teaching is the positive relationships that staff have with students and their good management of behaviour. Assessment is used well by many teachers to match work to the individual needs of students, but not all staff ensure that all students have a clear understanding of how well they are doing and what they need to do next to improve.

Good leadership ensures that there is an effective understanding of what the school does well and what needs to be improved. The school's self-evaluation is effective in identifying the key areas for development. Planning for improvements is very detailed and well focused, providing a clear identification of how the school will continue to improve. This, together with the very strong commitment of staff and governors, ensures the school has a good capacity to improve even further. This is also shown in the effective monitoring of provision, which is used well to support developments such as improving teaching and learning. The very good range of information about each student ensures swift action is taken when a student is at risk of underachieving. This very clear focus on each individual ensures that all students have equal access and opportunity to all the school offers. However the school is only just beginning to establish processes by which it can identify the progress of different groups. As a result, staff, governors and other stakeholders, although very clear about the achievements of individuals, do not have a clear enough overview of the progress of the different groups within the school.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- By the end of this academic year, ensure that closer attention is paid to showing students how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve.
- Develop further systems for collating information about students so that staff, governors and other stakeholders have a clearer understanding of the progress of the different groups within the school.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Although students' attainment is average overall, many students have large gaps in their knowledge as a result of missed schooling through truancy and/or exclusions. They make good progress in their learning. For many this is because they learn to take control of their behaviour and improve their social skills. This growing enjoyment of their education leads to good achievement by all groups of pupils. The very much improved attendance of the vast majority of students from their previous settings reflects the positive outlook of students about their education. As a result they achieve well and many leave with a range of accreditation including GCSEs and entry-level accreditation. Many participate in vocational courses in Years 10 and 11 and gain the skills they need to continue with their education when they leave school.

Students' positive attitudes are reflected in their high level of concentration in lessons. For example, in an English lesson Year 10, students listened well to a programme about apartheid and expressed strong views about the rights and wrongs of this. They were able to consider a poem on the same theme and identify with the views of the poet. Younger students sometimes struggle with their behaviour and attitudes because their needs are very complex. However, they are keen to learn and this was reflected in a Year 7/8 mathematics lesson when one student left the lesson but returned later asking if he could complete the work he had missed. A reflection of their improved behaviours is the way many will ignore others if they are being disruptive and will continue with their work.

Students work well together, such as in a Year 10 art lesson when writing their names in Chinese script or in physical education when primary pupils developed their catching skills well. Students clearly enjoy a challenge, for example, Year 10/11 students when trying to build a rectangular shape out of blocks when learning about primary numbers. They quickly recognised the properties of primary numbers. There are no significant differences in the progress of students and girls make the same progress as boys.

Students say they feel safe and consider that staff deal with their concerns well. They have a good awareness of how to stay safe and healthy. While all know the risks in smoking, a few still struggle to give up the habit. There is, though, good awareness of healthy foods, for example, Year 10 students in a food technology lesson were clear about what are healthy foods. Their skills in kneading dough and making bread rolls were very impressive. Participation in sporting activities is good and students talk enthusiastically about opportunities in and out of school to stay fit.

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For many students their stay at the school is relatively short and their involvement therefore in the local community is limited. For those who stay longer there are opportunities to make use of local facilities, such as sports centres and nearby museums and galleries. Students talk positively about their work on a local allotment and the people they have met there. Opportunities for students to extend their involvement in the community both locally and globally further are being developed but at this stage are limited.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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

How effective is the provision?

Students benefit from good teaching which is generally well planned. Support staff are used very well to work with individual students and provide a high level of support both for learning and behaviour. Lessons are often planned to be fun. For example, in a communication session a range of activities encouraged Year 7/8 students to listen to each other and make eye contact when speaking. Teachers make good use of technology, particularly in music. Here staff are very skilled at using the music programme and students are very proud of their achievements in producing a melody.

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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Teachers compile good records of students' work and assess these well, often annotating the work to show the level of support provided. In the best examples there is a clear indication of the level the student is working at and what they have achieved. This, however, is not always consistent and at times the assessments are too broad and do not show how the student can improve further. The school has already identified the need to encourage students to be more involved in assessing their own progress.

The good curriculum enables the large majority of students to successfully return to mainstream or other settings. The curriculum for Years 7, 8 and 9 has been improved so that it better meets the more complex needs of students. The primary curriculum is very strong, as is the curriculum for Years 10 and 11, because there are very good opportunities for students to develop their skills. The curriculum for the secondary pupil referral unit is good and is being developed further so that it is more closely aligned to the students' mainstream curriculum.

The care and welfare of students is given very high priority and the excellent links with other agencies support this well. The very good procedures for managing behaviour enable students to understand how they should behave in a variety of situations.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

This is a school that is constantly looking to improve what it does. The individual centres are well led and through regular meetings all senior staff are fully conversant with all the issues of the whole school. This results in all senior managers being aware of strengths and areas for development. The very effective reviews of the actions taken ensure that governors are fully informed of the progress the school is making in addressing identified weaknesses.

There is good monitoring of the progress of each student in all aspects of their education, but the school is still developing how this information can be used to give a better understanding of how well the different groups within the school achieve.

Close links with parents and carers enhance students' learning well. Communication is good. Regular phone calls and good attendance by parents and carers to events and meetings ensure they are well informed. Students are kept very safe because systems for assessing risks and staff training in aspects of safety and child protection are excellent. The school's work has developed excellent partnerships with mainstream schools across the authority.

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 school works effectively with local groups in supporting not only its own parents and carers but in providing resources for those in the nearby area. These close working partnerships, together with the school's close links with local community, ensure that community cohesion is good. There are good plans in place to develop the school's role nationally and globally. Governors know the school well and provide a good level of challenge and support. They recognise the need to have better, more concise information of the impact of the provision on the different groups of students in the school.

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	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Views of parents and carers

The small number of parents and carers who responded to the Ofsted questionnaire were generally very positive. Their views can be summarised by one parent who wrote that since their son had started full-time at ACE 'he has improved a lot' and now attends school regularly.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at The Alternative Centre for Education 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 9 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 87 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	0	0	7	78	1	11	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	1	11	8	89	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	7	78	2	22	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	3	33	6	67	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	1	11	6	67	1	11	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	2	22	6	67	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	1	11	7	78	1	11	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)	4	44	5	56	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	2	22	6	67	1	11	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	6	67	2	22	1	11	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	4	44	4	44	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	3	33	5	56	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	6	67	3	33	0	0	0	0

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 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 inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

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 were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

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 pupil's 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.



5 February 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of The Alternative Centre for Education, Brighton BN1 7LA

Thank you very much for being so helpful when we visited ACE. We enjoyed talking to you and seeing how hard you work. We were pleased to see that you enjoyed school and are learning to manage your behaviour well.

We found that ACE is a good school that ensures you make good progress in your learning. As a result you achieve well and are well prepared for life when you leave school. You make good progress in your personal development and this helps you a lot in getting on with other people. You work well in lessons and benefit from good teaching. It was good to see how much you enjoyed lessons like art and music.

The school is well led and staff look after you well and keep you safe. You show a good knowledge in keeping fit and eating the right foods. Some of you showed very good skills in making bread! A few of you smoke and it would be better for your health if you could try giving up the habit.

We have asked the school to:

- make sure you have a better understanding of how well you are doing and how you can improve even further
- develop better systems for collating information about how well you do so that staff, governors and other people to have a clearer understanding of how well the different groups in the school do.

You can help by making sure you carry on going to school regularly and ask your teachers at the end of each lesson to tell you how well you are doing.

We wish you well for the future.

Yours sincerely

Sarah Mascall

Lead Inspector

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