

Ashdale

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	134346
Local Authority	Middlesbrough
Inspection number	341460
Inspection dates	9–10 December 2009
Reporting inspector	Alastair Younger

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	14–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	47
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Jan Brunton
Headteacher	Mr Andy Cooper
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one additional inspector. The inspector visited seven lessons, and held meetings with the teacher in charge, the chair of the management committee, staff, groups of pupils and several representatives of the local authority. The inspector observed the centre's work, and looked at much of its documentation, including the centre improvement plan and the teacher in charge's most recent report to the management committee. The inspector also examined examples of pupils' past work and visited one of the settings in which pupils are educated by an external provider. No parents responded to a questionnaire sent out before the inspection.

- pupils' achievement, including an analysis of the impact of absence and exclusion on their progress
- the behaviour of pupils, to examine its impact upon the enjoyment and safety of others
- the quality of teaching and learning including teachers' use of assessment to help speed up pupils' progress
- the rigour of safeguarding and care procedures, especially in relation to the large number of external settings in which pupils are educated
- the effectiveness with which changes in leadership and management have been managed.

Information about the school

The Ashdale Centre was judged to require special measures when it was inspected in March 2006. Its progress was subsequently monitored by Her Majesty's Inspectors and removed from special measures in September 2007. In September 2009, a new teacher in charge was appointed following the promotion of the previous incumbent.

All pupils currently attending the centre have been permanently excluded from their previous schools. Most transfer to the centre from a Key Stage 3 pupil referral unit. Many have spent most of their secondary education outside mainstream school. Records show that it is pupils' behaviour in mainstream education that has had a negative impact on their education rather than any significant degree of learning difficulty. Most pupils are White British. Sixty four per cent of pupils are entitled to free school meals. There are more than twice as many boys as girls.

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?

4

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

4

Main findings

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this centre requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading managing or governing the centre are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement.

Following changes in the leadership and management of the centre its effectiveness has rapidly declined and its capacity for improvement has been greatly reduced. There is very little evidence of recent self-evaluation and criteria against which signs of improvement or change can be evaluated are not specific. In the autumn (term) there has been a very large escalation in the use of exclusion. By the date of the inspection there had already been 74 fixed-term exclusions. Behaviour at the centre is often very poor and a small number of pupils say they do not feel safe. At one point during the inspection the centre was very close to being out of control, despite the presence of many more staff than pupils. Several staff commented that the centre does not run smoothly on a day-to-day basis. Attendance has fallen in comparison with the same period last year. It was 56.8% at the time of the inspection.

Achievement is inadequate. Some teaching is not good enough to help pupils to overcome low achievement. Expectations are often too low and in too many lessons it is pupils who decide whether any learning will take place. Disruption in class is commonplace.

A strength of the centre is the way it has developed an extensive programme of education and training opportunities using external providers to promote a good mix of vocational training as well as opportunities for developing environmental awareness and participating in healthy activities.

The decline in the centre's performance and the weaknesses in aspects of teaching and leadership and management, including deficiencies in self-evaluation, indicate that the centre's capacity to improve is inadequate.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise the quality of leadership and management to a suitable standard by:
 - improving self-evaluation by developing more comprehensive ways of measuring progress and improvement against which the effectiveness of the centre can be judged
 - evaluating the impact of action taken to bring about improvement.

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- Raise attendance by:
 - improving the management of behaviour
 - reducing the use of exclusion by 50 % over the next term so that it is used as a final sanction rather than an everyday occurrence.
- Improve teaching and learning by raising expectations and improving teachers' skills in managing behaviour in lessons.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**4**

Records show that before they entered secondary education pupils' attainment was below average. During their time in the centre their attainment falls further behind and many pupils attain a lower level at the end of Year 9 than they did at the end of Year 6. Nearly all pupils are hugely disaffected when they are admitted to the centre. The education they receive is not good enough, with the result that most pupils leave with few and low qualifications. Last year, on average, pupils gained one grade D to G GCSE in English, mathematics or science. Pupils experience relatively greater success when being educated by external providers than they do in the centre. During the inspection pupils made little or no progress in about half the lessons but made good progress in improving their basic skills alongside gaining important vocational skills while attending a motor vehicles course.

Reasons for underachievement include the fact that attendance is low. At its current rate, it seriously reduces pupils' prospects of achieving success in GCSE examinations, where coursework forms an important part of assessment. It is significant that attendance is almost 20 percentage points higher for courses provided by external providers than it is when pupils are due in the centre. Punctuality is poor. This causes organisational problems when pupils arrive too late to take advantage of transport provided to relay them to other provision. Low attendance and poor basic skills, coupled with inadequate behaviour are seriously compromising pupils' future economic well-being.

As a measure of deteriorating behaviour, exclusions this term have almost reached the number for the whole of last year. Reports of racist incidents are increasing. Records of serious incidents raise important questions about pupils' safety and are evidence of totally unacceptable behaviour in and out of the centre on a regular basis. Some of this has a significant impact on the centre's standing in the local community; for instance, when a group of pupils abused staff and the general public at the local leisure centre. Pupils play virtually no role in helping to improve the centre. At the inaugural meeting of the centre council, their main concerns were about shortening the centre day and being given more and better opportunities to smoke. This latter point illustrates one way in which pupils fail to adopt healthy lifestyles.

However, not all pupils behave badly and some attend well. Following the disruption to learning on the first day of the inspection staff ensured that the centre was a calm and safe place on the second day.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	4
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	4
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	4
The extent to which pupils feel safe	4
Pupils' behaviour	4
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	4
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	4
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	4
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	4
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	4

How effective is the provision?

There are examples of good teaching but there are too many occasions when teaching is ineffective. Sometimes this is because expectations are too low. At other times learning objectives are not met because some teachers do not manage challenging behaviour successfully. This results in some pupils making no progress while that of others is diminished because teachers are spending more time trying to maintain control than they are teaching. Where teachers are confident and present pupils with work that they find relevant, they are more likely to be successful. For example, a good lesson on work skills enthused pupils to think about how they could present themselves in the best light to future employers. The teacher was supportive and non-judgemental, pupils related well to him, saw the purpose of the exercise and worked hard. Classes are small and a generous amount of classroom support is provided. In many lessons there are similar numbers of adults and pupils and in some there are more adults than pupils. This support is not used to best effect. A large part of pupils' failure to meet their potential in GCSE examinations is because of their failure to complete coursework. Not enough teachers recognise that this is as much their responsibility as it is the pupils. There is

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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insufficient variation in the tasks that pupils are set. Too often everyone in a class is given the same work, irrespective of prior learning, because teachers are not paying sufficient attention to the results of assessments or to their own observations of what pupils have already achieved.

A good, relevant programme of provision has been developed through the involvement of external training providers. This is often of a vocational or recreational nature. Pupils respond well to this, as shown by their higher attendance on these courses. Some external training providers succeed in promoting pupils' basic skills alongside providing valuable vocational skills. This was seen when pupils practising car mechanic skills completed job sheets which required a lot of writing. They also calibrated and checked dimensions, which enhanced their understanding of the relevance of numeracy, and completed assessments using computers, which helped them to understand the usefulness of technology. Every pupil involved in this session spoke enthusiastically about it. The same relevance and enthusiasm is not often seen in the centre and the result is that pupils too often lose interest or fail to attend.

Staff endeavour to ensure the effective care and support of pupils. In most cases this is the case but there are times when pupils are not kept safe because staff are unable to manage what can be extremely challenging behaviour. Risk assessments are thorough and health and safety legislation is meticulously observed, but potential catastrophe seems never far away. For example, pupils have been recorded as causing a minibus driver to lose control and have been reported to leave transport when it was still moving. Attempts to improve attendance are rigorous but often fail. The regular exclusion of pupils and their frequent absence puts all too many in a position where no one in authority is in a position to care for, support or guide them.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	4
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	4
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	4

How effective are leadership and management?

Leaders and managers are not doing enough to ensure that the centre runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis. Staff confirm that the inadequacies observed on the first morning of the inspection were not an exception. Leaders and managers, while fully acknowledging the reasons why pupils are present in the first case, are not developing provision sufficiently to meet their needs. Pupils who are most in need of help are excluded rather than offered the support they need to overcome their difficulties. Inadequacies in leadership and management at the highest level in the centre have become increasingly

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evident over the course of the last term. Not enough has been done to resolve this issue. Help has been offered by the local authority but has not been insisted upon despite the obvious problems. However as the local authority are in effect the governing body of the unit they have failed in their responsibility to ensure that weaknesses are tackled decisively.

It was a very positive sign that during the inspection five parents attended a coffee morning hosted by the centre. This is a clear sign of the centre's commitment to involve parents in their children's futures.

The philosophy and policy for the safeguarding of pupils extend well beyond minimum requirements. However, they are not sufficiently effective because in extreme situations staff are unable to manage pupils' behaviour. Arrangements to ensure pupils are safe when attending external provision are satisfactory.

The centre contributes little to community cohesion. Pupils show little interest in contributing through developing an understanding of how people outside of their immediate acquaintances live.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	4
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	4
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	4
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	4
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	4
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	4
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	4

Views of parents and carers

No parents responded to a questionnaire distributed before the inspection and no parents chose to share their views with the inspector.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Ashdale to complete a questionnaire about their views of the centre.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the centre.

The inspector received no completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 47 pupils registered at the centre.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	0	0	0	0	0	0	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)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	0	0	0	0	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.



Dear Pupils

Thank you to those of you that helped me with my recent inspection of your centre. I was particularly grateful to the small number of you that tried hard to behave well for your teachers. Nonetheless, too many of you did not behave well enough and made it very difficult for your teachers and those who lead and manage the centre to show it at its best.

I found that, although some things are working reasonably well, the centre is not providing you with an acceptable standard of education and needs 'special measures' to help it improve. Inspectors will regularly visit to check that the leaders and managers are working hard to put things right.

I have asked for some important areas of work to be improved. Leaders and managers need to have a better understanding of how well the centre is doing so that they can prioritise what to improve and check that things are getting better. Staff need to raise their expectations of what you can do and how you should behave in lessons. They should give you harder and more interesting work. You can all help them by concentrating more and letting them know if work is too easy or too hard rather than looking for ways to misbehave.

Too many of you do not attend regularly and this needs to improve. I have asked staff to try even harder to help you to attend, but you can also help. If you do not attend the centre you are unlikely to learn!

At times some of you let your poor behaviour get in the way of other pupils who want to get on with learning. Staff have responded to this by excluding many of you from lessons. This is happening too often, so I have asked the centre to find alternatives sanctions to excluding you except where there is no other option. I have also asked them to improve the way in which they deal with your behaviour.

You all have an important part to play in making your centre better. I hope that you will contribute to this by improving your behaviour and attendance. If you cooperate with the staff, it will help Ashdale to become a better centre and a more enjoyable place to attend.

Yours sincerely

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