



**ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION CENTRE  
INSPECTION REPORT  
JUNE 2006  
LEAD INSPECTOR: PACHENT SMYTHE**



**Cayman Islands Schools' Inspectorate**

***Working in partnership for high quality education for all students***

## Foreword

The aim of the Schools' Inspectorate is to contribute to continuous school improvement in the Cayman Islands, through rigorous external evaluations of schools and by providing high quality policy advice and training.

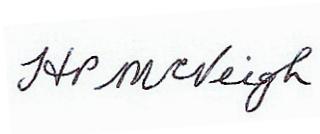
Each school receives an inspection every four to six years. The inspection identifies the school's strengths and the areas that need to be improved. Between inspections, schools are visited regularly by a link inspector to check on the progress that has been made in tackling the priority areas and to support the school in its own self-evaluation.

Inspectors are guided by the criteria in the Cayman Islands Handbook for the Self-Evaluation and Inspection of Schools.

Inspections provide schools, parents and the community, the Education Department and the Ministry of Education, Training, Employment, Youth, Sports and Culture with an external and impartial evaluation of the quality of a school's work and its impact on students' learning and the standards they achieve. Through the publication of inspection reports, inspection contributes to accountability, transparency and openness within the education system.

Self-evaluation by schools is considered to be an important part of the Cayman Islands school evaluation model. Together with inspections, self-evaluation provides a balanced system of internal and external accountability for schools.

The Inspectorate hopes that this inspection will contribute in a positive way to helping the Alternative Education Centre become a more effective institution.



**Helena McVeigh**  
Chief Inspector of Schools

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL AND THE INSPECTION TEAM

### THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Government  
Age range of students: 12-17 years  
Gender of students: Mixed  
Number on roll: 44  
School address: 42 Pines Drive  
P.O. Box 910 GT  
George Town, Grand Cayman  
  
Telephone number: 345-9496058  
Fax number: 345- 9498462  
Email address: [radand@myway.com](mailto:radand@myway.com)  
Name of Principal: Mr. Raphael Daniel

### THE INSPECTION TEAM

Lead inspector:	Pachent Smythe	Cayman Islands Schools' Inspectorate
Team inspectors:	Roger Holmes	Cayman Islands Schools' Inspectorate
	Caroline Dawes	Cayman Islands Schools' Inspectorate
	Andrew Littlewood	Overseas inspector

## INTRODUCTION

### Information about the school

The Alternative Education Centre (AEC) is the only facility of its kind in the Cayman Islands for students, aged 12 to 17 years, who have been excluded from their high schools due to behavioural difficulties. The centre offers students an opportunity to achieve in a different setting.

The centre offers three main programmes - the tutorial unit, the transition unit and the suspension unit. **The tutorial unit** has three classes for students, who have been referred by George Hicks High School. The aim is to reintegrate them into mainstream classes, depending on the progress they make in their behaviour. **The transition unit** offers a 'school-to-work' programme that lasts one or two years for older students who have been expelled. The students spend two days at the centre doing academic work and three days on work experience. **The suspension unit** takes students who have been suspended by the high schools for a short time.

At the time of the inspection, there were 44 students- all of whom are Caymanian- on the roll. Many of the students have complex social, emotional, mental and behavioural problems. Boys significantly outnumber girls in all three units.

The centre sustained serious damage during Hurricane Ivan which occurred in September 2004. The staff did a considerable amount of work, both in and out of the school, to get students back on track for the remainder of the school year. As a result of this effort and hard work, the centre was one of the first government institutions to reopen after the hurricane.

The aims of the centre are to:

- Develop appropriate standards of behaviour both in school and society
- Develop a lifelong love of learning and encourage each individual to take responsibility for his or her own learning
- Create and maintain a calm, secure and caring environment where students can develop confidence, self esteem and mutual respect and a culture in which creativity can flourish

The Alternative Education Centre was last inspected in 2002 by a team of local and overseas inspectors. The team acknowledged the following key strengths of the centre:

- A safe and secure environment in which teachers and students can work together
- Students who are keen to improve can return to mainstream education
- Key members of staff who manage behaviour well
- Positive and supportive parents

The team also suggested key issues for improving the work of the centre. These included the following:

- Identify and resolve issues relating to management of the centre
- Identify and address issues for underachievement in all subjects
- Promote literacy skills across the curriculum
- Put in place effective arrangements for assessing and monitoring students' academic progress and personal development
- Review and agree the curriculum for the transition and tutorial units
- Plan and implement arrangements for effectively promoting students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

### **Information about the inspection**

This inspection took place from the 13<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> June, 2006 and involved a team of four inspectors, including the centre's link inspector. The following aspects of the centre's work were looked at:

- Standards achieved by students in English (language arts), mathematics and science
- The effectiveness of teaching and how well students learn
- The quality of students' personal development
- Students' attendance and punctuality
- The quality of the curriculum and how students are assessed
- How well the centre is led and managed
- The quality of the support and guidance offered to students, and the level of care for their welfare
- The effectiveness of links with parents and the community

The team also evaluated how well teachers were helping students to use their literacy, numeracy, and information and communication technology (ICT) skills in all of their school work.

The inspection team gathered evidence in the following ways:

- 22 lessons or parts of lessons were observed in language arts, mathematics, science, art and craft.
- School documents, including teachers' planning, curriculum statements and guidelines, were looked at.
- Students' work was scrutinized.
- Inspectors spoke with students and took into account their views from the questionnaires.
- Inspectors heard students read during lessons.
- Discussions took place with teachers and other members of staff from the George Hicks and John Gray High schools.
- Questionnaires completed by the teachers at the AEC were taken into account.

- Comments from parents who attended a meeting prior to the inspection and from the parents' questionnaires were considered.
- Information obtained through the regular link inspector visits was taken into account.
- Inspectors visited worksites and held discussions with employers, students and supervisors prior to and during the inspection

Inspectors used the following grading scale to evaluate and describe aspects of the school's work.

<b>Grade</b>	<b>Judgement</b>	<b>Description</b>
1	Outstanding	Good in nearly all respects and exemplary in some significant areas
2	Good	Good in some respects. Weaknesses are minor and not in significant areas
3	Satisfactory	Adequate in most areas. No significant weaknesses, but no major strengths
4	Inadequate/unsatisfactory	Some significant weaknesses (might only be one or two) that have a negative impact on learning and standards of achievement

## INSPECTION FINDINGS

### How effective is the centre overall and how much progress has it made since the last inspection?

The Alternative Education Centre provides a satisfactory education for its students overall. The staff provide a very caring, safe and secure environment and good relationships are a feature of the centre's positive ethos. The centre is successful in enabling many of its students, some of whom have complex emotional, social and mental health problems, to make considerable improvements in their behaviour and attitudes towards learning.

The centre has improved since the previous inspection, under its new leadership. Some strengths have been maintained, but there are areas that still need to be improved further. The AEC will continue to need external help to move forward, particularly in those areas that are outside of its control.

### What the AEC does well

- It improves the behaviour of many students
- It helps to raise students' confidence, self-esteem and concentration
- The transition unit prepares students well for being more effective members of society and for the world of work
- Staff have established a strong ethos of care, commitment and concern for students
- There are effective links with parents, carers, guardians and the community

### What needs to improve

- Communication within the centre
- The curriculum, particularly for students in the tutorial unit
- The system for monitoring students' performance throughout the centre
- The effectiveness of some of the teaching
- The understanding of the role and purpose of the suspension unit and the way it is used by the high schools

*The centre is expected to modify its existing improvement plan or to prepare a supplementary action plan to address the areas for improvement identified above. The amended plan or supplement should be sent to the Education Department and Schools' Inspectorate within 40 working days of receipt of the final report. The centre is required to provide parents with an annual update on the progress that is being made in addressing the areas identified as needing to improve.*

## How high are standards at the AEC?

Most students in the suspension unit are working close to, or sometimes above, the expected level for their age. They are in the unit because of disciplinary rather than academic reasons.

Students in the transition and tutorial units are performing at levels below what might be expected for their age. Several have literacy and numeracy skills that would be found in students who are two or more years younger. Evidence suggests that the lower attainment of students in the transition and tutorial units may be often explained by their poor patterns of attendance. These students also often have very short attention spans and most of them have entered the centre with poor attitudes towards learning, which contribute to their low attainment.

## How effective is the teaching and what impact does it have on students' learning?

The quality of teaching is **satisfactory** overall and some students make good progress.

The teachers at AEC are dedicated and caring, and want students to do well. This is demonstrated in the good relationships between teachers and students, both in and out of the classroom. Teachers work well with teacher's aides to support students, and the classroom ethos is generally positive, which encourages and supports students' well-being. As a result, most students are developing more positive attitudes to their learning.

Some of the teaching is very good. In these lessons, teachers plan well and provide practical, hands on, interesting activities for students. They engage students in their learning through discussions, role-play and carrying out research and manage behaviour well, giving individual support. Examples of this were seen in an art lesson where students made various designs with clay, and in an English lesson, where students successfully acted out the parts of different characters. Some teachers make good cross-curricular links, for example, including spelling and vocabulary in an art lesson, and linking mathematics to reading when discussing timelines and population in an afternoon reading session. This helps students to better understand the lesson and make contributions.

Some teachers start lessons by facilitating discussions and making clear to students what they will learn, individually or as a class. Students then know what is expected of them because teachers give clear explanations, instructions and guidance at the start. These teachers know their students well and make necessary adjustments for them, for example by having shorter lesson periods or more frequent breaks to cope with short attention spans.

Teachers often use effective questioning techniques that help students to become involved and to contribute to the lesson. For example, in a reading lesson, one very capable student conducted an interesting and motivating discussion while the teacher observed and facilitated the lesson. This kind of student involvement helps them to stay on task, rather than misbehaving, and to complete assignments independently and support each other. There are opportunities for students to use dictionaries and to

extend their skills in doing research on the Internet. Many students demonstrate well-developed ICT skills in typing and using computer-based programmes.

Teachers generally have a secure knowledge of the subjects they are teaching and use this to enrich and extend students' learning. For example, a teacher gave a clear explanation and relevant examples that helped students to understand and recognize lines of symmetry in common objects and to be able to transfer and apply the skills learnt. Students made very good progress, responded well and remained on task throughout the lesson, which they seemed to enjoy. In lessons where students are helped to make good links by building on prior knowledge, they are actively involved in learning new concepts and skills and generally work quietly and constructively.

Although there are examples of very good teaching, there is too much inconsistency within and between classes. Teachers do not always have a good enough knowledge of the subjects they are expected to teach. They generally use a narrow range of teaching methods and their planning does not take enough account of the different needs of students. As a result, some students do not participate well in lessons and do not make as much progress as they should, because the work is either too easy or too difficult for them. For example, students using the Reading Upgrade computer program, are expected to start from a very low level, progressing through letter names and sounds before they can move on to more appropriate work. On the other hand, some of the worksheets that students bring from their high schools are beyond their capabilities. When the work is not appropriate, students often get bored or frustrated, refuse to try, and their behaviour deteriorates.

The centre has a behaviour plan, but not all teachers apply it effectively or consistently, and this can sometimes lead to further disruption of lessons.

Teachers usually mark students' work regularly. However, very little help is given on how the work might be improved. Teachers rarely review work at the end of lessons to consolidate learning. Most lessons therefore end too abruptly, and do not provide opportunities for students to reflect on their learning.

### **What is the quality of the curriculum and how effective are the arrangements for assessing students?**

The curriculum and procedures for assessment are **satisfactory** overall.

The AEC recognizes its role in providing for students who do not respond well enough to mainstream secondary education. In almost all cases, this involves changing the way that students behave, so that they can return to schools or onwards into society. To support this aim, the curriculum is designed with a focus on improving students' behaviour. This works most effectively in the transition unit, where its innovative curriculum meets the needs of the students well. The curriculum in the tutorial unit is satisfactory. In the suspension unit, however, the curriculum is not appropriate, mainly because the staff do not have enough information about the students.

Assessment arrangements are satisfactory. However, many different systems are used and not enough use is made of ICT to store the information and make it readily available to staff.

The curriculum in the transition unit is matched well to the aim of helping students move into the world of work. It provides a good blend of work experience and taught elements that help them understand why their behaviour has been a problem and how it can be improved. Students who have struggled in school often respond well to their work placements as a result of the support they receive from AEC staff and the understanding shown by the employers. Elements of the work that the students are taught are assessed externally and students are awarded certificates. This makes them feel very proud, boosts their self-confidence and improves their attitudes towards work generally. This is often the first time they have managed to achieve any real measure of success.

In the transition unit, students follow courses in computer skills and some of their courses are externally assessed, with positive results. They also respond well to creative and practical work, such as the ceramics lesson they have each week. There are well-developed plans to introduce vocational courses in beauty culture and culinary arts.

The tutorial unit aims to prepare students to return into mainstream education. This aim places more complex demands on the curriculum. Students must maintain a reasonable rate of academic progress if they are to move back successfully into their year group in high school. They need, therefore, to continue to study at least the core subjects. At the same time, the most pressing need is to modify their behaviour and so considerable time has to be devoted to such topics as anger management. This aspect of the centre's work is successful with many students. However, students are not responding as well to the academic parts of the curriculum, where the work is often too similar to what they met and failed to cope with in mainstream schools. This is particularly noticeable when students are given worksheets. The close support that they receive from staff helps them to make some progress and the extensive use of ICT helps to motivate them, both as a subject of study itself and as a way of finding information about other subjects.

At the moment the curriculum in all three units gives too little time to activities that draw on the students' imagination, creativity, self-expression and physical abilities.

The AEC does not receive adequate information from the high schools about the students who have been sent to the suspension unit. The AEC teachers are often not made aware of what work the students have been doing and, as a result, may give them tasks that are not suitable.

Staff at the centre supervise students' work closely. They involve the students in discussions and in reflection about the reasons for their exclusion and how they could avoid it happening again. These exchanges are a very valuable part of the centre's work.

The centre faces two problems with assessment that are not in its direct control. The first is not getting assessment information from the referring high schools when students are suspended. The second is the difficulty of getting timely medical and psychological assessments. Both of these factors adversely affect the centre's ability to meet the students' needs.

Students who have been at the centre for some time are well known to all staff. Teachers make extensive notes on students' performance, focusing particularly on their behaviour. This information is shared among the staff during informal discussions and more systematically at each staff meeting. As a result, students meet a consistent approach from all the adults, which helps them to feel secure in the centre and to make progress. However, teachers use different methods of recording this assessment information and so it is difficult to establish an overall picture of students' performance and to monitor the effectiveness of the procedures that are being adopted. The centre has begun to investigate a system that would provide a unified approach and make information much more usable and accessible than the current, paper-based system.

### **How well is the Alternative Education Centre led and managed?**

The principal knows each student and the reasons that led to them being sent to the centre. On arrival he meets with their parents or guardians and outlines the centre's aims. The parents welcome this strong link and the partnership between home and the centre, which ensures a continuous two-way flow of information regarding students' progress throughout their time at the AEC.

The principal is a strong advocate for the students at meetings with the senior high school staff, the Education Department and the Ministry, and ensures that the centre has a high profile throughout the island. For example, as a result of his concerns about the increasing number of students displaying symptoms of poor mental health, he successfully arranged a meeting between the relevant professionals, politicians and others, to help speed up the assessment process.

The principal effectively arranges and monitors the placement of students assigned to the suspension unit. This responsibility, which occurs nearly every day, is taking up too much of his time.

The principal encourages staff to use a variety of strategies to cater for the wide range of ages, abilities and needs that are found in each group. He has begun to monitor the quality of teaching and learning, but this needs to be further developed in order to ensure that staff provide a more creative and genuinely alternative approach to the teaching of literacy, mathematics and science. At present, the principal relies on the teachers' own abilities to recognize and rectify their weaknesses. Opportunities to provide additional assistance and advice or to model what is expected are missed.

Several of the teachers, as well as the principal have experience and expertise in managing the varied and complex needs of these students, but opportunities to share their skills and support each other need to be planned. There is no one in charge of coordinating the three classes in the tutorial unit, and there is therefore a lack of consistency in provision and practice.

Currently, communication at all levels throughout the centre is a weakness. There are planned occasions when all the staff meet but not enough time is given to discussing issues involving the curriculum or how to teach the students most effectively. The principal has a clear vision for the centre and has produced an action plan, but this has not yet been discussed with the staff.

Two important changes will be introduced in September, when the culinary arts and beauty culture facilities are ready for use. More opportunities need to be found for all staff to take an active part in the centre's strategic planning processes.

## **Students' personal development**

The provision for students' personal development is **satisfactory**.

All the staff who work at the centre are patient and sensitive to the students' needs. They work hard to build students' self confidence and improve their personal development. Devotions provide a good spiritual start to each day. The adults who are present at devotions provide positive role models, but students do not generally take an active part in the act of worship.

The development of the students' moral values is satisfactory. While some have difficulties in following an appropriate moral code, all the students have a good idea of what is fair and know the difference between right and wrong. The students also have good opportunities to make sensible choices and build independent skills, not only in the centre, but also during their work placements.

Most students show respect for the staff and for the premises. There is almost no litter or graffiti around the centre. Students move around the building and site in a sensible manner. Several of the classrooms include attractive displays of students' work, as well as educational posters and interesting items of local and international news. The centre arranges regular visits to places of interest. Students welcome visitors. The frequent arrival of new students, particularly in the suspension unit, does not disturb the daily routines of those already there. The newcomers settle in reasonably quickly.

The centre makes satisfactory arrangements to enrich the students' awareness and understanding of their own culture. There have been visits from the Governor, the National Hero, members of the Legislative Assembly, and representatives of local churches during the past year. There are photographs of the members of the Legislative Assembly in every classroom. There is some interest in current affairs, which is maintained through good use of the Internet and local newspapers throughout the centre. The library has a small collection of stories about young people in other countries and cultures. However, there is not enough use of music, art or video recordings to broaden the range of experiences that would support students' cultural development.

## **How effective are other aspects of the centre's work?**

### **Links with parents and the community**

The AEC has established **good** links with parents and the community.

Parents of students who attend the centre are kept well informed about their children's performance. This process begins when students are first admitted. Parents are told why their child is moving to the centre, which unit they will be working in, and what improvements are expected. This establishes a partnership between parents and the centre, with both sides having a clear understanding of the problems that have to be overcome and sharing a commitment to succeed. In almost all cases, this involves changing the way that the child behaves. Parents are informed about the general strategies that will be used, particularly the use of the points system to recognize and reward good behaviour. However, the detailed plans for working with each individual are not discussed with the parents - the partnership would be even more effective if this happened.

Staff at the centre contact parents readily whenever they need to. The counsellor works closely with the parents. She maintains very good contact with them, usually by telephone, but also through home visits, all of which are carefully logged. The overwhelming majority of calls made by staff to parents are to inform them about problems or incidents that have arisen. Parents usually respond positively and help the centre deal with the issue.

Parents also receive regular written reports about students' progress and are invited to discuss these with the teachers. This discussion helps them to understand how well their child is working on their particular programme.

The centre has a high profile in the community. This helps to ensure that students in the transition unit are able to secure work placements. At the moment, the private sector provides more work placements opportunities than the government sector. This results in a fairly narrow arrangement of options for the students.

The centre also makes effective use of the wider community for field trips, such as visiting the turtle farm and the airport. The development of the students' self esteem has also been supported well by visits to the centre by dignitaries such as the Governor and the National Hero.

Links with the two government high schools, George Hicks and John Gray have been effective in helping some students return to mainstream education. Unfortunately, information about students' past performance is not always available to the centre when students are sent to the suspension unit. Students from the tutorial unit who attend the high schools for particular subjects take forms with them which the teachers sign. These forms are used to inform AEC how well the students have behaved. This is useful information, which could be extended to include an outline of the work that was covered in the lesson. Staff at the children's homes also maintain close liaison with the centre and with the high schools, so that they are able to monitor students' progress and look after their interests well.

## **The support and guidance offered to students and level of care for their welfare**

Provision for the students' support, guidance and welfare is **satisfactory**.

Records of each student's progress are diligently maintained. Additional data and correspondence about the students from their high school and case conference notes are held centrally. However, to make information more accessible to all staff, the same recording system for all the units, using a suitable computer program, should be considered.

The counsellor has also established good links with the high schools and effectively supports students during the early stages of their return to mainstream education.

Sometimes decisions to extend a period of suspension have reached the centre towards the end of what the student thought was his/her time at AEC. Occasionally, the information comes after the student has returned to their school. This is distressing for the students who have acknowledged their mistakes and wrongdoings and are now presented with an additional period of punishment. A real effort must be made by all those involved to prevent this from happening.

There are also issues in the suspension unit regarding the expectation that a day's absence means a further day is added on to the suspension period. This situation is inequitable as it does not apply to those students who serve their suspension at home rather than at the AEC. It also results in some students' suspension being dragged out over several months.

Relationships between adults and students are good. Opportunities to talk to individuals about their future plans and to provide advice and assistance are well managed throughout the centre. They are a feature of the work of the transition unit, where most of the students are able to graduate and start regular employment. A good working atmosphere is created during lessons and the students generally respect each other. All have made marked improvements in their behaviour and attitudes to study since joining the centre. However, there are occasions when students become distressed. They are usually helped to calm down and return to their studies, but teachers and teaching assistants need to discuss the most appropriate ways to deal with these situations.

The centre provides a safe and secure environment for its students. Doors are locked to prevent access to certain areas and the centre's security guard is a respected member of the staff team who relates well to students during breaks and lunchtimes.

The grounds provide a good area for recreation and the small garden enables students to grow and tend different vegetables and work with staff and their colleagues in an informal setting.

Each unit has students of different ages. Staff make reasonable allowances for this in order to ensure that the groups work together harmoniously. However, more opportunities for all the students in the tutorial unit to work together would give the girls a chance to work with other girls.

## **Students' attendance and punctuality**

Students' attendance and punctuality are generally **unsatisfactory**. For many students this is a feature of their lives. Some students do not return promptly to classes after break and lunch times. However, students on work experience do attend regularly and are punctual. Teachers record attendance satisfactorily. They do encourage regular attendance, maintain strong links with the students' parents and make good use of the senior truancy officer by following the correct procedure for reporting absentees.

## What is the quality of teaching and learning in language arts, mathematics, science and ICT?

### Language Arts (English) and literacy across the curriculum

Provision for English is **satisfactory** overall, but with some aspects that need to be improved.

English is taught throughout the centre and forms part of the core curriculum, particularly in the transition unit. Lessons focus mainly on grammar and comprehension skills. There are some opportunities for writing and for the study of literature, but this varies across classes. Some students return to their high schools for their English lessons.

Students generally make satisfactory progress in their individual work. They often show good attitudes, participate well in discussions and complete assignments from the high schools or worksheets given by teachers at the centre. On many occasions they work independently. Some students ask their teachers when they need help with the work. The teachers respond well and give clear explanations. For example, in a vocabulary lesson, students searched for the word 'feint' in the dictionary and the teacher discussed its meaning and how it could be used in different contexts. This exercise gave students a clearer understanding of the word itself and the concept of homophones.

The overall quality of teaching is **satisfactory**. In all classes, teachers use a variety of texts from which they copy materials to supplement the students' work. Some teachers have incorporated poetry reading, role-play and literature to add richness and enjoyment to the lessons, and these help to maintain interest and motivation and improve learning. In some instances the work is not appropriate for the students, because teachers do not know enough about the students' level of performance. This causes considerable frustration to students when the work they are given is too easy or too difficult.

Teachers generally have a secure knowledge of the subject and how to teach it effectively. They sustain students' attention, partly through the good relationships that they have established with them. In some lessons, however, teachers rely too much on worksheets and some students struggle with the material.

There is no coordination of the subject throughout the centre. This leads to inconsistencies in practice and limited provision and use of materials to improve students' learning. Teachers plan lessons for their individual classes and use computer based activities, such as the Reading Upgrade program, to complement the work and to interest the students. In spite of this technology support, the teaching in this subject does not always meet the needs of the students.

Teachers mark students' work fairly regularly. However, they give very little feedback to the students on how they might improve their work.

The library is currently not as useful or inviting as it should be. There are very few books and the room is not very welcoming.

Some teachers help students to learn and apply their literacy skills in other subjects. In an art lesson, for example, the teacher emphasised the spelling and meaning of words. Students benefited from the activities such as quizzes, guessing games and spelling

prompts, and maintained interest throughout the lesson. There were other good examples such as a mathematics lesson on symmetry and a vocabulary lesson in science where students studied sunflowers. This development of literacy across the curriculum, is not, though, done often or consistently enough and many opportunities are missed. It is an area that needs to be encouraged and developed.

### **Mathematics and numeracy across the curriculum**

Provision in mathematics is **satisfactory**.

Mathematics has a prominent place in the curriculum and students spend a good proportion of their time working on aspects relating to numbers. Much of this involves working independently and responding to work sheets. Students often work well in this way, particularly when they are carrying out calculations that they can handle easily. This approach provides useful consolidation for students but does not move them on.

Students make good progress when they are taught in small groups and introduced to new ideas. In one successful lesson, older students tackled a problem solving activity well, as a result of the teacher's sensitive approach. The teacher used praise skilfully to encourage the students to use calculators and tackle tasks that they originally thought were beyond them.

Teachers are all confident in presenting the subject to students, but in some lessons there is too much emphasis on drill and practice rather than on developing an understanding of the concepts. In some lessons, students are helped to see the importance of mathematics in their own lives, examining bank statements for example and acting out the role of a shopkeeper to give change. Students see these activities as relevant and interesting and learn well from them.

Teachers in each class organize and plan their own work for mathematics as there is no overall coordination of the subject. ICT is often used well to provide practice exercises for students and to enliven their learning but otherwise there is little equipment to support the teaching of mathematics. Students' work is marked regularly and accurately. Results are recorded, but students' assessments do not include information about what they can do, what they find difficult and what they need to work on to improve.

Individual teachers make good use of mathematical ideas when they are teaching other subjects, for example, looking at average salaries and the effect of different percentage interest rates in life-skills classes. This approach works well, but there is no overall policy for using mathematics to help student understand other subjects or to reinforce their understanding of mathematics by seeing its applications in action. As a result opportunities are missed.

### **Science**

Not much science was seen during the inspection, so a judgement on the quality of the overall provision cannot be made.

Some very good work takes place in the small garden where students develop a theoretical and practical understanding of how plants grow. They respond very well to

this type of practical activity and often work responsibly together. Relationships with staff are good and students enjoy the work.

Other work in science tends to be less practical and involves the teacher giving information, rather than students carrying out investigations or practical work to find things out for themselves. As a result students do not learn as much as they could and they are not very interested in the subject.

The centre has very little equipment for science activities. No one has the role of promoting the subject in the centre and encouraging teachers in their work. The new culinary arts and beauty culture projects will provide many opportunities to link science concepts and build practical applications.

### **Information and communication technology**

The provision for ICT is **good**.

The centre makes extensive use of ICT in several different ways. It is taught as a subject in its own right and teachers also use it as a way of helping students learn in other subjects.

Students are confident in using ICT. They switch on their equipment, log on and launch programs with little or no support from adults. Many students have followed computer courses on the internet and have good skills in word processing and other applications. These courses are formally assessed through the student's coursework and they are very proud of the certificates that they receive. This is a form of success that many of them have not achieved before and is important in building their self esteem and helping them to see a purpose to education generally. Overall, students use ICT well to handle text, change its appearance for different purposes and import images.

Students make good use of the Internet. They use a range of web sites frequently and also utilise search engines well.

Some students have explored the use of other programs, such as spreadsheets and presentation software, but these aspects of ICT are not as consistently well developed. There is a weakness in how students' work is saved. During the recent maintenance of the computer system, the contractor erased all of the students' work. This was demoralising for the students and could have had devastating consequences had the work been needed for external examinations. At present, students are not using folders and files consistently or often enough to save their work so that it is secure and easily retrievable.

Fewer students than usual have computers of their own and as a result they value their access to computers at the centre highly. Students are so keen to use the computers that teachers use them as a reward, which helps to improve their behaviour.

The principal takes an active part in promoting the use of ICT across the school. All staff make effective use of computers and their approach helps students to gain confidence and skills in ICT.