

Albany Centre

Beard Road, Bury St Edmunds, IP32 6SA

Inspection dates

13–14 November 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Inadequate	4
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Teachers do not always use the information about students' prior learning to set clear intentions for them to achieve or to match activities to students' individual needs.
- The use of feedback in lessons and when marking students work is inconsistent; students do not always know how to improve their learning.
- Teaching does not always challenge the thinking of more-able students to extend their learning.
- Teachers seldom set homework that builds upon what students have already learned.
- Teachers do not manage poor behaviour in lessons consistently well.
- The few students who are persistently absent make less progress than they could.
- Subject leaders do not monitor the impact of teaching on students' learning within their subject, rigorously enough.
- There is no leader for mathematics, to ensure high quality teaching/achievement in the subject.
- Teachers' individual performance targets do not focus strongly enough on improving the quality of teaching.

The school has the following strengths

- In some lessons, students make good progress.
- Students do well in vocational studies.
- Students are well prepared for the next stage of their learning; all leave for further education or employment.
- Most students make rapid progress in their attendance in a relatively short period of time.
- Students generally behave safely and feel safe.
- The headteacher, who is ably supported by the deputy headteacher, provides strong and purposeful leadership in moving the unit forward in order to improve the quality of education.
- The unit provides good opportunities that enrich students' learning.
- The local authority provides good support for the unit in building a strong senior leadership team and enabling the unit to improve.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed six lessons, three of which were joint observations with the headteacher or deputy headteacher. In addition samples of students' work were scrutinised jointly with the headteacher and deputy headteacher
- Meetings were held with a group of students, senior and subject leaders, the chair of the management committee and a local authority representative.
- The inspector took account of three responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) and held telephone discussions with three parents.
- The inspector observed the unit's work and scrutinised a number of documents including a summary of the unit's self-evaluation and school action plan, data on the progress of current students, safeguarding policies and procedures and records of exclusions, incidents of behaviour and attendance.
- The inspector also took account of an official complaint about the unit.

Inspection team

Declan McCarthy, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

In accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement.

Information about this school

- The Albany caters for students living in the western area of Suffolk who have been excluded from schools or who are at risk of exclusions due to their poor behaviour.
- A high proportion of students are known to be eligible for the pupil premium (additional government funding for children entitled to free school meals, those of service personnel and those in local authority care).
- All students are supported at school action plus or have a statement of special educational needs primarily for behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. The majority of students have additional learning difficulties in literacy, numeracy and thinking skills.
- The unit was given a notice to improve at its last inspection; significant improvements were required in the monitoring of teaching, learning and assessment, the monitoring of attendance, the promotion of community cohesion and the effectiveness of the management committee.
- An inspection visit took place in May 2012 and determined that the unit had made satisfactory progress in addressing the areas for improvement identified at its last inspection.
- Nearly all staff are new in post; the leadership team has been strengthened with a new headteacher and a new deputy headteacher.
- A new chair of the management committee is in post.
- Some improvements to the building have been made recently to make better use of the space available.
- The school uses the 'Zone for Learning' centre in Thetford to offer vocational courses.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that at least 80% is good or better by:
 - using information about students' prior learning to set clear objectives for them to achieve and to plan activities matched to their individual learning needs
 - consistently providing feedback both in lessons and when students' work on what they need to do to improve their learning
 - challenging the thinking of more-able students so their learning is extended
 - setting regular homework to consolidate learning
 - consistently managing low level disruption in lessons.
- Improve attendance by:
 - ensuring tutors work more closely with parents and carers to promote good attendance
 - working more closely with outside professionals to increase the attendance by 20% of those few students who are persistently absent by May 2013.
- Improve leadership and management by:
 - ensuring subject leaders rigorously monitor the impact of teaching on learning and progress
 - working closely with the local authority to appoint a leader for mathematics by April 2013
 - including sharply focused performance targets for all staff to improve the quality of teaching.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Students enter the unit with below average levels of attainment and by the end of Year 11 in 2012, their attainment remained below average as a result of slower learning due to weaker teaching. Results at GCSE were below average in 2011.
- The majority of parents, but not all, who responded to the questionnaire and in discussion, believed their children were making good progress. Most students who attend regularly are making good progress towards their examination courses in the relatively short time they have been in the unit but the poor attendance of a few affects their achievement.
- More-able students do not always learn enough because their thinking is not challenged sufficiently in some lessons. For example in an English lesson, the more-able students easily made complex sentences and quickly lost interest because their learning was not extended.
- Although students with additional special educational needs make the same progress as others, they sometimes find learning too difficult because tasks are not always matched well enough to their individual needs.
- Students enjoy learning vocational subjects such as carpentry, construction, hair and beauty with local colleges and other providers and child development in the unit, because they can choose their own subjects to learn. As a result they try hard and make good progress in gaining appropriate qualifications in a relatively short period of time. This prepares them well for the next stage of their lives; all students move on to further education or employment.
- Unit data and students' work shows that currently students are on course to achieve their targets for GCSE and vocational examinations.
- Students are gaining qualifications as sports leaders due to the well-conceived sports leadership programme.
- Students are steadily improving their use of literacy and numeracy skills across a wide range of vocational subjects.
- Students known to be eligible for pupil premium make the same progress as their peers because staff use funding appropriately to personalise their learning and to provide courses such as environmental studies which they enjoy and which prepare them well for further education. For example, the unit used funding for a few students who were interested in developing an aquarium, which ultimately led to the successful completion of a fish husbandry course at college.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Although there has been significant improvement to the quality of teaching with no inadequate teaching, since the last inspection, not enough teaching is good or better.
- Teachers do not always make use of their information about what students already know to build on students' prior learning and set demanding objectives for them to achieve. Teachers rarely set homework to consolidate students' learning.
- Some teachers do not consistently match learning tasks to different abilities so that more-able students found the learning too easy and those with additional special educational needs find learning too difficult. As a result, teaching of students with additional learning difficulties in literacy and numeracy, in lessons also requires improvement. This was seen in lessons, such as in personal and social education, and in students' topic work, where students of all abilities were given the same tasks to complete.
- In lessons where teaching is good, students are given good feedback on how to improve their learning. For example, in a science lesson, the teacher carefully explained how students could move to higher GCSE grades by explaining how they did their research and providing a

bibliography. This does not happen in many lessons.

- Students' books demonstrated clear inconsistencies in marking and matching tasks to different abilities. Teachers always provide positive comments but there are too many missed opportunities to provide students with clear guidance on how to improve their learning.
- Good individual support outside of lessons for students with additional learning difficulties in literacy, many of whom are known to be eligible for pupil premium, through a structured literacy programme ensures these students are beginning to make good gains in reading and spelling.
- The basic skills of literacy numeracy and information and communication technology are taught effectively across a range of vocational subjects.
- Teaching of students with additional learning difficulties in literacy and numeracy in lessons also requires improvement because tasks are not always matched to their special educational needs.
- Teachers maintain good relationships with students and usually manage behaviour well. On a few occasions teachers are too tolerant of low level disruption, such as calling out, in lessons.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

requires improvement

- Although it has improved since the last inspection, attendance remains below average due to the poor attendance of a few students. Senior leaders rightly recognise the need to build stronger links between tutors and parents and carers to promote good attendance and to work more closely with outside agencies to improve the attendance of the few students who are persistently absent.
- Most students are making good progress in their attendance because the unit provides a range of learning opportunities, which students can choose, to stimulate enjoyment.
- Exclusion rates during the first half of this autumn term have been relatively high amongst the new intake of students because they were testing out their boundaries with new staff. Exclusions have fallen rapidly during this half term as they have responded more positively to the clear expectations for learning and behaviour.
- Parents and carers who responded to the online questionnaire agreed that behaviour and safety required improvement. There are some incidents of bullying which are properly recorded. Students are developing their awareness of different types of bullying and said that staff deal effectively with incidents as they occur. In discussion, the majority of parents and carers confirmed that bullying is dealt with effectively and recognised that their children are making good progress in behaviour and attendance.
- Students generally stay safe and behave appropriately in lessons and around the unit. Occasionally, students walked out of a lesson, or called out while others were talking.
- Incidents of unacceptable behaviour are reducing rapidly as students begin to re-engage with learning. As a result, their attitudes to learning are improving.
- Students are usually courteous and polite to visitors.

The leadership and management

requires improvement

- Although senior leadership is strong, subject leadership is still developing and requires improvement especially in mathematics. A new leader for English has just taken up post but a leader for mathematics has yet to be appointed. The unit, with the support of the local authority, recently held interviews for a mathematics leader but preferred not to appoint as applicants were not deemed suitable. They are continuing to work closely together in order to appoint a suitable teacher to lead the subject.
- Senior leaders, with good support from the local authority, are effectively monitoring the impact

of teaching and learning and progress in English and mathematics. They rightly recognise the need to ensure that subject leaders rigorously monitor the impact of teaching on students' learning within their subjects.

- A new and more robust system for the management of staff performance, based on the latest guidance, has been introduced which links individual targets to achievement and unit development plan priorities. Although these targets refer to the teaching standards, there are no specific targets to improve the quality of teaching. The unit plans to relate the achievement of these targets to salary progression.
 - The headteacher, with good support from her deputy headteacher has rigorously monitored teaching and its impact on learning across the unit. They have developed good training opportunities and mentoring to address weaknesses in teaching. As a result of the effective use of capability proceedings and good opportunities for training and support, weaknesses in teaching are reducing. This has led to the appointment of stronger teachers and the elimination of inadequate teaching with a steady increase in good or better teaching, enabling the unit to overcome the significant weaknesses identified since the last inspection.
 - All staff returned completed questionnaires that reflect overwhelming support for the new leadership team. They are proud to be members of staff at the unit rightly recognising that leaders are doing all they can to improve teaching and that the unit is well led and managed by senior leaders. In discussion, parents said that the unit was well led and managed on a day to day basis and that they are kept well informed about their children's progress
 - The unit has continued to improve the curriculum to ensure it is more relevant to the needs of students. Students have good opportunities to take at least three GCSE subjects in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. They can also choose to do additional GCSEs such as child development, religious studies and the newly introduced environmental science.
 - Students are able to choose from tailor-made vocational courses in carpentry and painting and decorating held in the 'Zone for Learning' centre in Thetford and a wider range of other vocational courses such as building, plumbing, motor vehicle maintenance, environmental studies, and hair and beauty at local colleges. These good opportunities are promoting much improved attendance and re-engagement with learning by most students.
 - There are appropriate opportunities to promote spiritual, moral, social and cultural development throughout the unit. Students sometimes experience a sense of awe and wonder when participating in outdoor adventurous activities. They are encouraged to reflect on their learning and behaviour during tutor time and in lessons. They develop team work and social skills through team games and stronger appreciation of diversity is promoted through work with a local Black youth worker who is a frequent visitor to the unit and provides an excellent role model for students.
 - The unit promotes equality of opportunity and tackles any form of discrimination appropriately as seen in the few recorded racist incidents which were dealt with effectively by the unit.
 - The local authority advisers regularly visit the unit, to provide training and support and hold staff to account for its work.
 - **The governance of the school:**
 - The management committee has been strengthened since the last inspection. The new chair is a frequent visitor to the unit and has implemented a system of focused visits to oversee its work. The committee ensures that statutory requirements are met, particularly for safeguarding, as seen in the rigorous vetting procedures for all staff and visitors, up-to-date training for all staff and management committee and close adherence to safeguarding policies. The committee has a good understanding of the quality of teaching and has been instrumental in supporting to improve teaching and learning. The members also have a good understanding of performance management across the unit and its links to improvement planning. They oversee effective performance management arrangements for the headteacher which focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning. They intend to link the new performance
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objectives for staff to salary progression and promotion. With this good support, the unit has continued to build on the improvement identified during the last monitoring visit, instilling confidence in staff and parents. The local authority and management committee ensure the unit manages its financial resources efficiently, through for example, the effective use of pupil premium funding. They hold the unit to account for the way the unit spends this money by, for example, carefully monitoring the effectiveness with which funding for pupil premium is spent by receiving reports and through focused visits

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	124529
Local authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	399717

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	17
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Headteacher	Jane Reason
Date of previous school inspection	14 September 2011
Telephone number	01284 754065
Fax number	01284 705373
Email address	admin@albanycentre.suffolk.sch.uk

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