

The Alternative Centre for Education

Queensdown School Road, off Lewes Road, Brighton, BN1 7LA

Inspection dates

14–15 March 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Strong leadership provided by the headteacher has led to ever-improving outcomes and many benefits for the students.
- The headteacher has been very well supported by the staff and the governing body in the quest to secure improvements.
- The achievements of most students are good. Their prior achievements are well below average for their age, reflecting their previously negative attitudes to education and their poor attendance records. Attitudes often change quickly and current outcomes are closer to national averages.
- Teaching is consistently good, with some that is outstanding. This makes a significant contribution to the students' good progress and helps most to make big strides in their reading, writing, communication and mathematical skills.
- Learning is enjoyed. The students are more at ease and feel more safe, secure and valued than in their previous settings. Behaviour is good and, for many, their attendance has improved markedly. Progress is good because the work is relevant and the students appreciate the individual care and attention provided.
- Leadership is good and staff morale is high. This has created an environment in which vulnerable students are able to make good progress in their work and personal development.
- The governing body is improving. Following re-organisation there have been changes in the way the governing body operates. They offer good support and are focused on long-term developments.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Achievement is not yet outstanding because in some lessons students are not offered enough opportunities to assess their work by discussing what they have learnt and how to work on improving their work.
- Opportunities for the students to read in lessons are not pursued consistently. For a small minority of pupils, poor attendance limits their progress.
- The scope for providing more varied courses on site has not been fully investigated.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed seven lessons and various other learning activities, including opportunities for students to read.
- Meetings were held with students, two members of the governing body, a representative from the local authority and staff. A number of stakeholders were contacted by telephone to gain their views.
- There were too few submissions to the online questionnaire (Parent View) for data to appear, but the inspector took account of the provision's own surveys of parents and carers. Returns from 24 questionnaires completed by staff were also considered.
- Inspectors scrutinised examples of students' past and present work and looked at various documents. These included the school's self-evaluation and planning, information on students' academic progress and records relating to behaviour, attendance and safeguarding.

Inspection team

Bill Stoneham, lead inspector

Additional inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The Alternative Centre for Education (ACE) was originally created in 2000 to provide an integrated service across the local authority for students with behavioural and social difficulties aged 7 to 16. This included provision for those with statements of special educational needs, as well as those attending the secondary pupil referral unit and the primary behaviour support centre.
- In September 2012, this provision was reorganised and ACE became a school on one site catering for students with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, all with statements of special educational needs.
- Numbers vary in each year group and many students join the school at different times throughout the year.
- The overwhelming majority of students are of White British heritage. It is rare for a student to have a first language other than English. Boys significantly outnumber girls.
- The number of students eligible for pupil premium (additional government funding for students known to be eligible for free school meals, who are looked after by their local authority or who have a parent in the armed services) is well above the national average. At the time of the inspection, no students were known to be the offspring of currently serving military staff. Eight students are in the care of the local authority.
- All Year 7 students are eligible for the Year 7 catch-up premium.
- The school uses a number of external organisations, including Plumpton and Northbrook Colleges of Further Education, to provide learning for students in Years 10 and 11.
- Since the re-organisation of this service in 2012, there have been a number of managerial changes. The current headteacher, who is seconded from the local authority, has been in post since January 2013.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise achievement further by ensuring that:
 - in every lesson, time is made available for students to describe and discuss their learning and assess the progress they have made
 - opportunities to encourage students to read, including reading aloud, are planned consistently
 - all students attend regularly.
- Investigate how the facilities at the school, including the grounds, can be developed so that a far higher proportion of what is offered is provided on site.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Virtually every student joining the school has had a disrupted education and prior learning is well below the standard expected for the age groups. Though standards remain below average by the time they leave at the end of Year 11, all groups, irrespective of their particular special needs, make at least good progress. Progress and achievement are good, with some working at GCSE level in English, mathematics and art, for example. Though more students are now entered for GCSE examinations, no early entries are made.
- No students leave without work experience or some form of accredited vocational qualifications. Students in Years 10 and 11 who do not follow GCSE courses gain qualifications in functional skills, including literacy and numeracy.
- Students are being well prepared for the next stages in their lives. Skills in reading, writing, communication and mathematics are improved well. Students of all ages were heard to read. Many did so with confidence and clearly enjoyed such challenges. However, in a minority of lessons, opportunities to encourage reading were not taken consistently.
- Since the previous inspection, the school has developed a detailed and effective system of recording and monitoring the performance of every student. Since re-organisation, this system has been expanded further and refined. Staff have detailed records relating to all aspects of each student's performance in terms of their academic work and personal and social development. This system enables staff to be set precise and individual targets for every student, and then to monitor progress against such targets accurately.
- Careful and robust monitoring procedures are also in place for students who study off-site. School records show that students attending further education colleges or working with other educational providers also make good progress, with little difference in the performance of boys and girls.
- Many students make significant strides in their academic work and in their personal and social development. Improved attitudes to learning, better social skills and greater self-esteem all contribute to good achievement. For a small minority, however, their reluctance to attend school regularly reduces the progress they make.
- The allocation of additional government funding made available through the pupil and Year 7 catch-up premium is carefully monitored. Much of the funding has been used to improve skills successfully in reading and writing by offering additional lessons. The school's tracking systems indicate that reading ages are rising and gaps closing. Self-evaluation has shown a further need to boost the students' skills in mathematics, so pupil premium funding is now being directed accordingly. Those pupils who are looked after by the local authority also make good rates of progress, similar to those of their peers.
- The school works in partnership with many other professionals, especially in health and social care. Well-planned partnership work ensures every student is supported adequately. The quality of this cooperative work is helping to secure good outcomes.

The quality of teaching

is good

- Good progress is made because lessons are taught consistently well, with some featuring outstanding teaching. None of the lessons observed was inadequate.
- Consistently good learning was promoted well in lessons because the students were challenged and the work was engaging. Many opportunities were offered for the students to work independently and at their own pace. This successfully promoted concentration and, in most cases, students applied themselves well to the planned activities.
- Staff work hard to establish positive relationships with their students. The quality of these relationships is key in raising students' confidence and self-esteem and contributes significantly to their good progress. Classrooms are calm, with the students accepting that school is primarily

a place of work.

- Though learning in lessons and over time is consistently good, opportunities to develop learning further are sometimes missed. Though staff offer good feedback to students on their work both verbally and through formal marking, it was rare to see teachers asking students to peer assess each other's work. It was also rare for teachers to ask students to describe what they had learnt, or what new skills or knowledge they had developed.
- Outstanding teaching was seen in art. The set work engaged and enthused the students. They had to research various drawing techniques used by graphic artists and then develop their own style. Aspirations were high and the teacher's very careful planning meant that each student could work at their own level. Outstanding progress over time was clearly evident and students studying for GCSE were undertaking their own research of different artistic styles, for example. Outstanding teaching is enabling students to experiment and develop their own ideas, as well as providing enjoyment and success.
- Good learning is further promoted by the quality of work undertaken by additional adults, who in most lessons work alongside the class teacher to plan lessons that consistently promote good learning.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- During their time at ACE, the attitudes and commitment of most students improve well. Students who previously may not have had the confidence to attend school, or who may simply have truanted, now attend with regularity. Some now even profess to enjoy school.
- A small minority still do not attend regularly. The majority, however, now have far better attendance records than when they were in mainstream education, with many now attending at levels close to, or even in excess of, the national average figure for secondary schools.
- Behaviour in lessons and around the school site is invariably good. Well-planned, interesting lessons help to ensure good behaviour by engaging the students. On the rare occasions during the inspection when the behaviour of some individuals slipped, staff applied sanctions consistently well and the youngsters involved then returned to being on task. The consistent and calm way staff apply the school's behaviour code makes a significant contribution to ensuring a safe and calm working environment, both on the main site and in the alternative provision.
- This positive working atmosphere is further fostered by the emphasis placed on praise and celebrating success. The Friday afternoon celebration assembly was a pleasurable experience. The students warmly applauded the achievements of others, one student gave an impromptu presentation and it was pleasing to see students realising that they could be successful in an education setting. For some this was an alien, but enjoyable, experience.
- Students are continually encouraged to lead safe and healthy lifestyles. Considerable work is undertaken on personal safety. There is a strong focus on being healthy. Emphasis is placed on eating healthily, avoiding the dangerous effects of drug, alcohol and substance abuse and adopting safe and sensible attitudes when out socialising.
- Appropriate work is also undertaken to limit bullying, and examples of anti-social behaviour based on racism, homophobic behaviour and the use of other insulting terms are all treated very seriously. Incidents are rare, but when they do occur, they are fully investigated and reported, with detailed follow-up actions.
- Considerable work is undertaken to ensure the safe and responsible use of mobile phones, for example. Much work is also undertaken to ensure that all students are fully aware of the dangers of cyber-bullying.
- Students expressed considerable confidence in their staff. They know that if they are troubled or worried, staff will always be on hand to offer help, advice and guidance. Students reported that they are safe in school and valued by staff.

The leadership and management are good

- The school benefits from having a skilled and keen staff who are determined to improve the life chances of students whose circumstances may make them vulnerable. All aspects of the school's work are well managed, with the senior team, in particular, supporting the headteacher well and fulfilling their own functions effectively.
- Responses to the staff inspection questionnaire indicated high morale. Staff are happy with the recent changes as they have resulted in clearer objectives and improving standards. One member of staff commented: 'Recent changes in leadership have already made a huge difference and behaviour is improving all the time. Expectations are higher and the whole ethos of the school is more positive.' Many other staff made similar comments.
- Partnership work is strong. Partners consulted during the inspection spoke warmly about the school's work. They identified key strengths in helping students, who have often had negative experiences of school, to change their lives, have high aspirations and successfully re-engage with education.
- Achievement and the quality of teaching are improving at a good pace because of improved monitoring, tracking and target setting procedures and because of the emphasis placed on the training of staff. Secure procedures for managing teachers' performance are in place. Only staff who meet the required standards will be able to progress up the salary scale.
- Many students spend part of their time being educated off-site. Senior staff and governors are keen to assess how the present site, including the ample outside facilities, could be better used to offer more choices, including more on-site vocational options and different forms of accreditation.
- Self-evaluation has improved considerably and is contributing well to improvements. A good development plan has been established and is helping to fashion improvements.
- The school and the local authority work well together. The quality of this partnership has contributed to the good improvements that have been made since reorganisation.
- Arrangements for safeguarding are thorough and meet statutory requirements. Risk assessments, including those for off-site work, are detailed and fit for purpose.
- A strong commitment to equality ensures that all students make good progress in their learning and personal development. Charity fund-raising, work on different religions and societies, local history studies and the emphasis placed on behaving well and acting with good sense all promote spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. Relationships across the school are good, with no evidence of discrimination.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body support the school well and have been instrumental in ensuring that the recent re-organisation has led to improved outcomes. They are improving their monitoring role, including taking a keener interest in the quality of teaching and the progress that all students make. They carefully analyse outcomes, including examination and test results, and they are fully involved in ensuring that there is a close link between salary progression and the effectiveness of classroom teaching. They are also seeking similar schools so that comparisons in performance can be made. Through their training, they are aware of how performance management works. They thoroughly monitor expenditure, including the way extra funding through the pupil and Year 7 catch-up premium is spent. They rightly judge that the recent improvements across a broad front mean that the school's overall effectiveness is good. They also know where further improvements are needed. They praise the work undertaken by all members of staff, but particularly by the headteacher and the senior team.

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	114678
Local authority	Brighton and Hove
Inspection number	401456

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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	45
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Fiona Johnson
Headteacher	Lorraine Myles
Date of previous school inspection	3–4 February 2010
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