

Alternative Complementary Education (A.C.E)

Martin's Gate, Bretonside, Plymouth PL4 0AT

Inspection dates	27–28 November 2013		
Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	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

- Pupils on all sites achieve well in mathematics, science and in their personal development. Most pupils also achieve well in English.
- Pupils make good progress during their time at the pupil referral unit (PRU). Younger pupils in Years 1 to 6 make particularly good progress in reading because of the regular daily use of a phonics approach (linking letters to the sounds they make) to improve their skills.
- Pupils in Year 11 attain good quality accreditation. The proportion of pupils attaining GCSEs has risen steadily over the past three years and last year all pupils left with some form of accreditation.
- Teaching is good and planned tasks meet the individual needs and abilities of each pupil. Teachers make very good use of questions to extend pupils' skills.
- Pupils behave well at all sites benefiting from the consistent way that behaviour is managed. All groups of pupils feel safe at their site.
- Parents are rightly pleased with the PRU and say that their child achieves well.
- The good range of subjects promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. This is enriched through some exciting outdoor activities and visits.
- The headteacher is very ambitious for the future and has built a strong team of leaders who are focused on raising achievement and improving the performance of staff through high-quality training and rigorous monitoring.
- The management committee checks the budget well. Together with governors it ensures that pupils eligible for additional funding rightly benefit from it.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Not all pupils at the Bretonside site make enough progress in English because the pace of learning in some lessons has been too slow, marking is not always helpful and literacy skills have not been used well in other subjects.
- Although overall attendance is improving, some pupils at Bretonside do not come to school as often as they should.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed 17 lessons across all nine sites, some jointly with senior leaders. In addition, inspectors made a few short visits to observe pupils learning, and listened to a few younger pupils read.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior staff, the Chair of the inclusion committee for Plymouth Learning Trust and member of the Plymouth 'Student Placement Panel,' the Chair of the Management Committee, a representative from the local authority and some pupils. An inspector also held a telephone conversation with the Chair of the Governing Body.
- The inspection team observed the work of the different sites across the PRU and looked at a number of documents, including information about pupils' progress, planning and monitoring documents, safeguarding information and some pupils' books.
- There were too few responses to the online survey (Parent View) to use them to form a judgement about parents' views but the lead inspector spoke to a number of parents on the telephone and received emails from two parents. The inspection team also took account of the 32 responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Denise Morris, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Christine Emerson

Additional Inspector

Kevin Wright

Additional Inspector

Information about this school

- This PRU caters for pupils who have been excluded or are at risk of exclusion, school-age parents, out of school due to medical conditions and as in-patients in hospital, and those pupils with statements who require individual support due to their very challenging needs. It has nine separate bases each catering for a different group of pupils.
- Derriford Hospital caters for pupils temporarily out of mainstream schooling due to illness.
- Bretonside is the administration centre and caters for secondary aged pupils in Years 7 to 11 with challenging behaviour, social and emotional needs and a few with a diagnosis of autism, who are in danger of being excluded from their mainstream schools or have been excluded from their mainstream school.
- Plym Bridge House caters for up to 14 adolescent psychiatric in-patients from the whole of the south-west peninsular.
- 'The Terraces' provides an eight week assessment period for pupils in Years 1 to 8. It is run jointly with the Children and Mental Health Service (CAMHS).
- ACE Primary provides for pupils in the primary age groups from Reception to Year 6 who require a six or twelve week respite from their mainstream school. There were no children of Reception age at the PRU at the time of the inspection.
- 'Wrap Around' is a provision that caters for pupils from special schools with extreme challenging behaviours.
- ACE LD Downham Care is an 'enhanced supervision' provision, short or long term for pupils with severe learning difficulties who also have very challenging behavioural needs and complex diagnoses. This provision is supported by Health and Social Care and is established as an alternative to out of city placement.
- 'Next Step' is based on thematic topic delivery with a youth work approach to re-engage severely disaffected pupils excluded from schools, in education and learning. It caters for up to six pupils at the Efford Youth Centre.
- The PRU also has outreach provision for pupils who are unable to attend school.
- Most pupils are White British. No pupils speak English as an additional language. There are far more boys than girls.
- The proportion of pupils for whom the school receives the pupil premium (additional funding for certain groups, including pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and those looked after by the local authority) is well above average. The school does not receive additional funding for primary sports or for Year 7 catch-up as these are retained by the mainstream schools.
- No early entries to examinations such as GCSEs are taken.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve achievement in English at Bretonside so that pupils make even better progress by:
 - ensuring that the pace of learning improves, enabling pupils to do more work in their lessons
 - ensuring that teachers' marking helps pupils to know their next steps and understand what they need to do to achieve them
 - expanding the use of literacy skills in all lessons so that pupils regularly read and write in other subjects.
- Improve attendance at Bretonside by:
 - reviewing strategies to encourage pupils to come to the PRU more often
 - working even more closely with families and agencies, including the Youth Offending Team.

Full report

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- The vast majority of pupils, including those who have a statement of special educational needs and those with a diagnosis of autism, achieve well from typically low starting points. All groups of pupils make good progress during their time at the PRU. Younger pupils in Years 1 to 6 make particularly good progress in reading because of the effective use of a phonics approach that helps them to catch up on past difficulties.
- Most pupils improve their literacy and numeracy skills and their behaviour while at the PRU. They make good progress in English, mathematics, science and personal development. The most able pupils usually work at a fast pace. Those who are at the PRU for long periods attain good GCSEs by the time they leave in Year 11.
- Many pupils say that they prefer mathematics to English because of the practical aspects of the subject. This was evident in Years 10 and 11 at Bretonside when pupils worked successfully on their individual mathematics tasks eager to succeed and find answers to the challenges set.
- Younger pupils at ACE Primary do well in reading and writing. Three pupils in Year 5, for example, used their phonics knowledge well to read unknown words and were eager to write their own accounts. They showed that they had made good progress during their five weeks at the PRU.
- Two pupils at 'The Terraces' achieved well in literacy as they searched for words to describe monsters. They enjoyed making monsters out of clay and their vocabulary improved as they were encouraged to think of as many adjectives as they could to make their monster 'frightening'.
- Pupils are provided with good experiences to develop skills that will help them in the future. They make good progress in developing their communication skills because of regular opportunities to respond to questions and offer opinions. Those who have a diagnosis of autism improve their communication and language skills because of the very patient way that staff encourage them to contribute.
- Vocational opportunities for the older pupils are extremely good offering the chance to gain qualifications such as National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) in motor mechanics, hairdressing and bricklaying, preparing them very well for their futures.
- Pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium achieve equally as well as other pupils because the extra funding is used to provide additional staff and fund excursions that enable these pupils to take part equally with other pupils.
- Achievement is not yet outstanding because the pace of pupils' learning in English at the Bretonside site has been too slow over the past two years and as a result pupils have not all achieved as well as they could.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teachers use the PRU's behaviour management system consistently well, resulting in calm lessons where pupils know and understand what is expected. Relationships are strong and pupils are aware that there is always someone they can talk to. This helps them to feel safe and encourages their positive attitudes to learning.
- In the best teaching some very effective use of questions extend pupils' skills well and encourage them to search for answers. An excellent example of this was seen in Year 5 at ACE Primary where pupils made particularly good progress in developing their literacy, communication and personal skills as they responded to questions about the books they were

reading. Questioning extended their language exceptionally well.

- Teachers regularly plan good quality individual or small group support for those with severe learning difficulties and those who require wrap-around care for their additional challenging needs. High quality provision at Downham and at the 'Wrap Around' care provision ensured that pupils were fully engaged and enjoyed learning so that they could achieve as well as possible.
- Teachers work closely with pupils' previous schools where possible to make sure learning builds on previous skills. This is not always possible because a high proportion of pupils have been out of school for some time prior to attending the PRU.
- The teaching of reading is almost always good and for younger pupils is very effective. Here staff listen to their pupils read every day. A phonics approach is used well to encourage the youngest pupils in their recognition of new or unknown words.
- Teaching assistants have good skills and are used well to engage and motivate pupils. They are sensitive to the needs of individual pupils and provide high quality support and guidance to them. They are fully involved in promoting learning and personal development across the PRU.
- Good, positive relationships between staff and pupils along with high expectations engage pupils well. At the hospital provision, for example, a pupil made good progress in writing because of the very good encouragement and support they received from the teacher.
- Assessment procedures have improved and now show how well pupils achieve over time but marking of pupils' work is variable across several sites. There are examples of excellent marking in some centres, at Plym Bridge and ACE Primary, for example. But at Bretonside in particular, marking does not inform pupils how they could improve or help them to know how well they are doing.
- Teaching is not yet outstanding because just occasionally too little work is planned to ensure that pupils work at a fast enough rate and because marking is not yet consistently effective across all sites.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Pupils referred to the PRU have a wide range of very challenging and very different needs which limit their learning and personal development. Case studies show that pupils' behaviour and learning improve quickly once they start because of the PRU's effective systems for managing their behaviour and supporting very individual learning needs. As a result, many pupils now have high aspirations and start to turn their lives around during their time there.
- Pupils on all sites told inspectors that they feel safe. They say that there is very little bullying or teasing, and any that does arise is quickly dealt with. Records show that there are few behavioural and racist incidents and that these have decreased over the past two few years.
- Pupils show positive attitudes to learning and value the good opinions of the staff. Most help to give out resources, clear up classrooms and are polite to adults. On most sites there is enthusiasm for learning and pupils respect their teachers.
- Previously disaffected pupils develop life skills that prepare them well to move on to the world of work because of the good quality of support that they receive. Those with complex mental health issues and/or emotional difficulties participate well in lessons and demonstrate positive attitudes because of the strong teamwork between staff and pupils.
- Pupils say that learning is 'better at the PRU' than at their previous schools because 'staff listen'. Most say that they are happy to come each day and attendance has risen steadily across the PRU in the past two years; but some pupils at Bretonside do not attend as often as they should. Behaviour is not yet outstanding because pupils do not yet have the necessary skills to work on their own and are sometimes over reliant on adult supervision in their learning.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher has a very strong vision for the future of the PRU. She is ably supported by the senior staff, subject leaders, members of the management committee and governors. She has made many successful improvements in the past two years that are having a positive impact on outcomes. Teaching in particular has been improved and ways of checking pupils' achievements have increased. The headteacher agrees that a few things still require improvement.
- Leaders are committed to improving teaching, and are making good use of the 'National Standards' to develop and manage the performance of teachers and other staff so that they can improve and progress up the pay scale. Senior leaders have a positive impact on improving the skills of other leaders and staff. There are some good examples across the PRU of how high-quality training has improved the staff's effectiveness and led to their promotion.
- The consistent approach to managing and improving pupils' behaviour is a particular strength of leadership. Training in the management of behaviour for all staff has ensured that the same effective methods are used across the PRU. As a result, pupils know what is acceptable and what is not. This results in their good behaviour and the calm learning environment.
- Parents who spoke, or wrote, to the inspection team were extremely supportive of the PRU and fully agree that their children have done well in their time there, are well looked after and safe.
- There are effective systems that enable staff to be fully involved in referral procedures and there are clear lines of communication between the PRU, mainstream schools, parents and the local authority to ensure successful placements.
- Subject leaders have worked diligently to strengthen subjects and topics so that they meet the needs of all the pupils well. Pupils are pleased with the wide range of exciting activities that are available. Additional therapies when needed and the wide range of good quality vocational experiences, trips and visits to the local community and further afield help to broaden pupils' awareness of places outside Plymouth, improve their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and build their aspirations for their futures.
- Leaders make sure that all pupils have an equal opportunity to succeed and are not subject to discrimination, as shown by the good progress made by pupils who receive additional support through the pupil premium. These pupils now achieve similar standards and progress at least as well in English and mathematics as the other pupils in the PRU.
- The PRU receives good support from the local authority and works effectively in partnerships with other local schools for the benefit of pupils.
- Safeguarding policies and procedures meet current national requirements.
- Leadership and management are not yet outstanding because, despite regular monitoring of teaching and learning, leaders have not recognised the issues identified in this report.

■ The governance of the school:

The management committee is supportive of the leadership team and recognises the effective improvements since the last inspection. Its members are involved in monitoring the PRU's work, checking teaching and behaviour and looking at how well pupils achieve. Monitoring is regular and provides good support to leaders but has not identified the issues detailed in this report. Members are fully committed to managing the performance of staff and there is a successful track record of providing high-quality training and ensuring that the best staff are rewarded for their efforts. The management committee manages the budget well and makes sure that finance allocated for pupils eligible for pupil premium funding is spent successfully for the benefit of those pupils. The committee works well with the relatively new governing body so that there is a good range of skills to the benefit of the PRU. Governors have a good knowledge of data and know how well pupils are doing. They are aware that pupils at A.C.E achieve as least as well as pupils in other similar settings.

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	136155
Local authority	Plymouth
Inspection number	426721

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	5–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	222
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Chair	Fiona Hutchings
Headteacher	Sarah Gillett
Date of previous school inspection	18–19 October 2011
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