

# Avenue Centre for Education

The Hub, Cutenhoe Community Learning Park, Luton, LU4 0QP

**Inspection dates** 5–6 June 2014

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	<b>Outstanding</b>	<b>1</b>
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is an outstanding school.

- The highly effective and determined leadership of the headteacher, together with the commitment and dedication of all staff, has created a highly successful school where every student matters.
- Students' achievements are outstanding. Their progress, despite many having experienced considerable disruption to their learning, is excellent.
- Consistently outstanding teaching enables all students to make rapid progress.
- Progress in English and mathematics, including for those students for whom English is not a first language, make rapid progress because of the unyielding focus placed on improving skills in reading, writing and numeracy.
- Outstanding learning is further promoted by the students' exceptionally good behaviour. Attendance is high. Relationships between students and between students and staff are trusting and respectful.
- The school provides a happy and secure working environment where students feel safe, valued and respected.
- Students are provided with many and varied opportunities to be creative, especially through English, art and music. These activities widen students' experiences and ensure outstanding promotion of their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The considerable progress made by the students is enhanced by the school's outstanding partnership work with other providers.
- Excellent and challenging support from the management committee, coupled with a strong and beneficial working relationship with the local authority, ensure that high standards are attained and that this outstanding school continues to improve.

## Information about this inspection

- The inspector undertook eight formal classroom observations of teaching and learning featuring eight different teachers. Other evidence relating to teaching and learning was scrutinised, including looking at students' books; other sources of written evidence; displays of art work; and video evidence.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, the local authority and the Chair of the Management Committee. Informal meetings were held with students.
- Too few submissions to register were made to the online inspection questionnaire (Parent View). The inspector took account of the school's own parental surveys and had telephone conversations with two parents.
- The inspector considered the views of 25 staff who responded to the staff inspection questionnaire.
- Various documents were evaluated, including information on students' current progress, the school's self-evaluation and planning, together with records on safeguarding, behaviour and attendance.
- The inspector evaluated the impact of additional funding made available through the pupil premium.

## Inspection team

Bill Stoneham, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- Avenue Centre for Education (ACE) provides for students aged 11 to 16 years who are at risk of exclusion or who have been permanently excluded from mainstream schools. All have behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. Most students are dual registered with their home schools.
- Significant changes have taken place since the last inspection. When last inspected, ACE was a short-stay pupil referral unit for Key Stage 3 students. In April 2013, ACE expanded and assumed responsibility for the local authority's Key Stage 4 pupil referral unit. The current academic year has been the first where ACE has functioned as an 11 to 16 service. Reorganisation has seen the school relocated onto the site of a former secondary school.
- Key Stage 3 students spend an average of 16 weeks with ACE, though for part of this time some education might be provided by the home school. The aim is to re-integrate students into secondary education.
- Most Key Stage 4 students will complete their education at ACE. The aim is to re-engage these students with education so that they can progress to further education, or prepare them for employment enabling them to progress to an apprenticeship or full-time work.
- ACE has responsibility for the Alternative Learning and Progression Service (ALPS), which is based on the same site. ALPS is a specialised behaviour service for permanently excluded students. This service did not form part of the inspection.
- Most students are of a White British heritage and boys tend to outnumber girls. A small number of students have a first language other than English, some of whom are not confident speakers or readers of English.
- All students have disabilities and/or special educational needs, though only a few have a statement of their special educational needs.
- Most students have experienced considerable disruption to their education prior to attending ACE. Some students will not have attended school for a year or more.
- The proportion of students funded through the pupil premium is below the national average and, in the case of dual-registered students, not all these funds are allocated to ACE. No Year 7 'catch-up' funding is received.
- The school works in partnership with many organisations, including the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS).
- At the time of the inspection, most Year 11 students were on study leave. On the second day of the inspection, a number of students took part in an educational visit to London.
- A range of GCSE and other public examinations are offered. This summer will be the first time that ACE will have received any examination results.
- The school's policy is not to early enter students for GCSE examinations. Exceptions are made depending on individual circumstances, especially if a student is deemed ready and capable to cope with the demands of a public examination.
- Each student is offered a bespoke programme of study. To ensure that all needs are met, off-site training providers, including the following organisations, are engaged: Active Support, Eden Therapeutic Education and OnTrack Education Services. Through these organisations, students can take courses as diverse as hair and beauty, motor mechanics and GCSE Polish.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Develop the use of the school site so that students' programmes of study can be widened to include more opportunities for environmental education and studies in leisure and sport.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils is outstanding

- Students make outstanding progress from their different starting points. Many have experienced significant disruption to their schooling, with some who have missed a whole year or more of their secondary education. Consequently, their attainment on entry is often well below that expected nationally.
- Outstanding teaching and support for their behavioural, emotional, social difficulties and physical well-being ensures that students fully re-engage with education and make excellent progress. As one parent commented: 'ACE has had a positive impact on all aspects of my son's life including his academic progress, attitude, relationships, trust of adults and self-esteem. He is now achieving things he never thought he could do.'
- In both Key Stages 3 and 4, students who are working on key skills programmes, including those for whom English is not their first language, make exceptional progress in their literacy and numeracy.
- Students eligible for additional government pupil premium funding make rapid progress in both English and mathematics and are closing the gap in attainment between themselves and other students. The school's data show that Key Stage 3 students, including those funded through the pupil premium, on average make about five years' progress in both their reading and writing during their stays in the school. Such outcomes reflect the school's commitment to equality of opportunity for all, where discrimination is not tolerated.
- More-able students have been entered for GCSE examinations and some are confidently predicted to be on course to gain high grades in this summer's examinations. Some of the Year 11 work seen in both English and mathematics was consistently in the A\* to B range.
- More-able students are provided for very well. Particularly talented students in subjects such as art and music are offered extra tuition. The school engages specialist staff to support students, where necessary. For example, a specialist vocal coach is helping an especially talented singer.
- Every student is offered excellent opportunities to succeed. Any gaps in progress or attainment between different student groups, such as those eligible for additional funding and others, are quickly identified and closed rapidly.
- Checks on work and progress are regular, detailed and accurate. They help to ensure that all groups of students, including those who receive part of their education through off-site learning providers, make outstanding progress. No gaps in the performance between any groups of students are discernible.
- All students are provided with their own personal programme of study. The programmes include detailed education provision and a strong emphasis on personal, social and health education. Key to the school's success is giving every student their own challenging targets and robustly measuring their progress towards them. Thorough progress reviews take place regularly and include daily summaries of how well each student has worked. Parent and carers are fully involved in this process and receive weekly written reports covering academic progress as well as feedback on behaviour, including attendance.
- All students are making impressive progress against their targets. They are not only reaching higher standards but also making exceptional progress against their non-education targets. For

example, the school's attendance rate now stands at over 95 per cent. Some students, whose attendance records at mainstream schools were below 20 per cent and sometimes zero, are now recording 100 per cent attendance.

- The success of the careful and detailed nurturing offered to the students is evidenced by the quality of the outcomes. Many return to mainstream education with greater confidence and higher self-esteem, and successfully progress through the mainstream school system. Though ACE has not yet had any students complete Year 11, its predecessor Key Stage 4 provision had successfully placed all its leavers in college, or in employment, for each of the last six years. All students due to leave this summer have provisional placements arranged.

## **The quality of teaching** is outstanding

- The quality of teaching is consistently outstanding over time. Students make rapid progress in subjects as diverse as English, mathematics, art, music and personal skills because of the exceptionally good teaching they receive.
- The school places high priority on improving students' skills in speaking, listening and reading. Staff use a variety of strategies to engage and encourage students, including those whose first language is not English, to participate. For example, a group of Year 9 students were observed working on the novel 'The boy in the striped pyjamas'. Outstanding progress was evident as the students read for themselves and out aloud, and then had to identify how the passages studied built up tension. Detailed moral issues were addressed, with all making particularly rapid progress in their reading skills. This included a student for whom English is a second language who read fluently and with confidence.
- Teaching is outstanding because of the excellent partnerships that exist between teachers and additional adults in managing students' learning. In a number of classes visited, outstanding learning was the result of teaching assistants and the class teacher working most effectively in unison. The teaching assistants had been fully involved in the planning for learning. Often working on a one-to-one level, they challenged the student to express their ideas and understanding verbally; they helped them with their written work and insisted that work was presented neatly and legibly. They avoided giving answers but instead, by careful questioning, teased out the correct responses.
- The school uses creative writing, art work and music to support its therapy work. Some of the creative writing is of a high standard, with students writing accurately and producing interesting work to read. Standards in art and music are often high, with students producing moving and thoughtful pieces of work. Recordings of a Year 9 student singing were moving and her work was of a very high standard. Students' use of computer technology is fostered well in music as various techniques about making and recording music using information and communication technology (ICT) skills are developed very well.
- Teaching of work-related subjects equips students with a range of excellent practical skills. Learning in Year 9 design technology classes was outstanding. In one class, students had designed their own wooden models based on a theme of transport, with one boy using pyrographical techniques to decorate his model motor cycle. In another class, students were developing health drinks using their own fruit-based recipes. In both cases, teaching over time was outstanding because of the way the projects had been developed with students having to undertake research and development and making notes and, where relevant, producing diagrams about their product design.
- The school's partnership work also ensures that students develop skills to a high level and in

different settings. The school works closely with Whipsnade Zoo and small groups of students attend a certificated course run by zoo staff. The aim is to help re-engage disaffected students through developing skills in team work and taking responsibility. Students also gain an understanding of animal rights and welfare, as well as raising awareness of potential career opportunities in animal management. The course involves one day's attendance over six weeks and students study modules on subjects as varied as invertebrates, rhino care and the feeding habits of carnivores. Each session is a mix of classroom theory and practical work. During the six weeks, the students undertake activities as varied as cleaning out the rhino enclosure to feeding a yeast-based food on a stick to lions. This course offers students life-changing opportunities and contributes hugely to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The graduation rate from this course to date has been 100 per cent.

- Teaching delivered by off-site providers commissioned by the school is closely monitored to ensure that the quality is high and that students' learning is enhanced. This provision also ensures that students have a wider choice of subjects available to study.
- Parents, carers and staff from mainstream schools praise the quality of teaching offered as it successfully equips students for the demands of mainstream school, further education, or the world of work.
- Detailed monitoring is undertaken to ensure that the quality of teaching, which was outstanding in the previous inspection report, has further improved. ACE has many gifted teachers who are thoroughly committed to changing the life chances of the students in their care.

### **The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding**

- Student behaviour is outstanding. Many students arrive with a history of school failure, with many readily admitting that they have made ill-informed choices in the past.
- Behaviour policies are all in place, but it is very rare for staff to have to enact any penalties because they foster excellent relationships so well. This is a happy school that students are keen to attend and often reluctant to leave.
- Mainstream school partners report that the positive changes in behaviour are long lasting. Partner secondary schools praise the work undertaken by ACE and also greatly appreciate the support that continues once a student returns to a mainstream setting. The quality of outreach work provided is of a high order.
- The local authority appreciates the quality of this partnership work. By securing long-lasting gains in behaviour, including improvements in attendance, there is a significant impact on reducing exclusions from mainstream schools.
- Students show great respect for one another. This was especially apparent at the start of the school day at breakfast club and at lunchtimes where staff and students mingled together socially, with some enjoying a sociable game of pool. Relationships between students and between students and staff are strong, with clear respect being shown. The extent to which the students help and encourage each other is a particular strength of this school.
- Strong and mutually respectful relationships are a positive feature of all aspects of the school's work. Behaviour management by staff is of a very high standard and students report that incidents of bullying or anti-social behaviour rarely, if ever, occur. The school's detailed incident logs support this view. Every incident is recorded in detail, though the number of entries since

the reorganisation of ACE some 14 months ago is small. This is against a backdrop of numbers on roll rising from 20 to nearly 50 students.

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is outstanding. Procedures for risk assessment, including the many off-site visits undertaken, are detailed and thorough. Students feel safe at school because of the care that has been taken by staff and the quality of the working and social environment that has been created.
- Students know how to keep themselves safe. They understand about different types of bullying, including cyber bullying and different lifestyles, and know what to do if anything occurs. Students have considerable faith in their staff.
- A most impressive aspect of behaviour is students' very high attendance. Many of them had poor records of attendance in mainstream education. Some simply refused to attend school, with prolonged periods of absence which were devastating in terms of their progress. The school's current attendance rate is very high and is critical to the outstanding progress that students now make.

### **The leadership and management are outstanding**

- ACE succeeds in changing the lives of students who have faced many severe and complex difficulties. Many factors contribute to these life-changing experiences but paramount is the role played by the school's exceptional headteacher. His vision and determination ensure that every student is nurtured and supported to the highest possible level, and given every opportunity to benefit from a second chance.
- In his work, the headteacher is given unrelenting support by every member of his outstanding staff and by the school's management committee. The management committee strike a good balance between offering support and holding the school to account for its performance.
- Working in partnership with the local authority, the headteacher, his staff and the management committee have ensured that the reorganisation in April 2013 took place almost seamlessly and without adversely impinging on the high standards established by ACE over a number of years. Relocation and a significant increase in student numbers did not deflect staff from ensuring that students continued to receive first-class education and care. As one staff member commented: 'In a period of considerable change, we have built on the existing strengths, maintained high standards and continued to raise the bar for the service we provide for students and schools.'
- Every student's individual programme of study ensures that they follow a range of subjects that most suits their needs. Such attention to detail is integral in raising standards. Students also have many and varied opportunities to seek and exercise responsibility through the work they do.
- Relocation has brought about many potential benefits. The school is now housed in relatively modern and reasonably well-equipped buildings. There is a considerable amount of outdoor space available for the school to utilise. This offers the potential for the school to enhance the range of subjects and accreditation it offers, especially in terms of environmental education, leisure studies and sport.
- The school only receives a small amount of the pupil premium funding. This is because most students who are entitled to it are dual registered with their mainstream schools. Available funds are used effectively and innovatively, helping to ensure outstanding progress, especially in



literacy and numeracy development, but also providing additional tuition for more-able students where needed.

- The school's procedures for gaining an accurate view of its own performance are detailed, thorough and effective. They inform its plans for the future and ensure that improvements are continuous.
- The leadership of teaching and its impact on learning are outstanding. Leaders' judgements on the quality of teaching are accurate and the provision for staff training is integral to ensuring that standards keep moving upwards.
- Staff at all levels ensure that parents, carers and other partners are kept fully informed about school life and how each student is performing. Parents and carers are provided with weekly written reports. Students' progress towards their academic and personal targets is tracked closely by regular checking, and swift and sensitive intervention when necessary. Partner secondary schools praise the quality and regularity of the information received.
- Programmes of study are designed to meet the needs of every individual student. This ability to provide bespoke programmes, with a strong emphasis on boosting skills in reading, writing, communication and mathematics, makes a significant contribution to developing students' interest in learning and raising their confidence.
- High quality partnership work ensures that both the education and social care provided is outstanding. Work with organisations such as CAMHS ensures that the emotional and medical needs of students are met. Innovative work with outside organisations, such as Whipsnade Zoo, provide exciting and enterprising opportunities for students to learn in different surroundings and gain experiences that they will always treasure.
- A strong and mutually supportive and beneficial working relationship between the school and the local authority has been established. The local authority accurately judges the school to be outstanding.
- **The governance of the school:**
  - The school's continual improvement owes much to the quality of its management committee and the level of support its members provide. They are totally supportive of the headteacher and his staff, and all the outstanding work they undertake. The management committee analyse outcomes thoroughly and their understanding of data on students' attainment and progress enables them to provide challenge, rigour and advice to leaders
  - Members of the management committee ensure that additional funding is used well and enables eligible students to achieve more. They know what the quality of teaching is and are proud that standards continue to rise. They are fully involved in the headteacher and staff's appraisal. They ensure that when any member of staff progresses up the pay scales, their additional reward is linked to how well they have helped students to achieve. Arrangements for safeguarding and child protection meet all statutory requirements.



## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	134525
<b>Local authority</b>	Luton
<b>Inspection number</b>	439608

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

<b>Type of school</b>	Pupil referral unit
<b>School category</b>	Pupil referral unit
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	45
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The local authority
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	March 2009
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