

Albany Centre

Beard Road, Bury St Edmunds, IP32 6SA

Inspection dates 18–19 June 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	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.

- The unit nurtures students, and supports them and their families, extremely well. Consequently, students become more enthusiastic about learning and most improve their behaviour and attendance considerably.
- Students receive excellent training and input to help them develop work place skills. This enables them and their parents to both see and, in time, to secure a positive future for them.
- Students make particularly good progress in mathematics and science. Overall, they achieve well and all move onto relevant and appropriate further education courses or training.
- Parents and students all agree that the staff look after students well and keep them safe. Parents are full of praise at how the unit helps their children to turn their lives around.
- Teaching and learning are typically good and enable students to make good progress. Support staff and teachers work very well in partnership with one another to the benefit of students' learning.
- Outdoor and adventure activities, such as sailing, help students to widen their experiences and to learn how to become more self-confident and adventurous.
- The headteacher is ambitious for the unit to become the best that it can. She is well supported by her deputy and the management committee in achieving challenging targets.
- Senior leaders are highly focused on improving the unit and enabling students to achieve the best that they can. They have secured good improvements since the last inspection.
- The local authority has provided good support for improvement and for teaching and learning.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Students do not always develop their writing skills to a high enough level, especially the more able.
- The quality of marking is inconsistent. It does not always provide students with clear guidance as to what they need to do to improve their work.
- Some ongoing issues beyond the control of the unit's leaders make it difficult for them to tackle the behaviour and attendance issues of every student without more support from the local authority.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector carried out three lesson observations, one of which was conducted jointly with the headteacher. Joint visits were also made to a centre providing vocational training to some of the unit's students and to a site where students were undertaking lessons in sailing.
- The inspector held meetings with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, members of the management committee, including the Chair and a parent representative, subject leaders, other staff and a representative from the local authority. A phone call to another local authority representative was also made during the inspection.
- A number of discussions were held with Year 10 students during the course of the inspection. There were no Year 11 students on-site as most had completed their GCSE courses and had just finished sitting the examinations.
- In carrying out the inspection, the inspector used parents' and Year 11 students' responses to the unit's own very recent surveys of parents and students. There were insufficient responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire (Parent View) to inform the inspection findings.
- The inspector took account of 14 Ofsted questionnaires completed by staff.
- The lead inspector observed the work of the unit. She looked at the unit's self-evaluation summary, the improvement plan, a range of policies and procedures, documents relating to the work of the management committee and the arrangements for ensuring that students are safeguarded. Documentation reviewed included data relating to students' attainment and progress, records of behaviour and attendance.

Inspection team

Gulshanbir Kayembe, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The Albany caters for students in Key Stage 4 living in the western area of Suffolk who have been excluded or who are at risk of exclusion from school due to their poor behaviour. There are more boys than girls in the unit.
- The purpose of the unit is to prepare students for their next steps in education and to ensure that all have a placement post-16 to continue their education or vocational training.
- The western area of Suffolk is large and many students travel long distances to get to the unit. Taxis are provided, through a contract managed by the local authority, for those who live too far to walk or take public transport. Even by taxi, some journeys to the unit take over an hour.
- While the majority of students join the unit at the start of the academic year, many join at various stages during the year. Students' time at the unit ranges from two full academic years to less than a term.
- Typically all, or nearly all, students tend to come from White British backgrounds.
- 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 proportion of pupils for whom the pupil referral unit receives the pupil premium, which is additional government funding for children in the care of the local authority and pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, is high. Over half the pupils are eligible for a free school meal.
- The unit uses a number of providers for vocational training and courses to students. These include the Zone for Learning in Thetford, West Suffolk College, The Green Light Trust and Nacro, the crime reduction charity.
- The unit had an Ofsted monitoring visit in March 2013 following the full inspection in November 2012.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Develop the quality of teaching even more in order to raise attainment further by:
 - providing students with regular opportunities to practise writing longer pieces of written work in English and other subjects, especially to challenge the more-able students
 - ensuring that marking gives students clear guidance on how to improve their work and make it better
 - making sure that students correct their work and act on the advice given by teachers.
- Improve the attendance of the few students who are not attending regularly and make it easier for the unit to manage their behaviour by working with the local authority to:
 - resolve the problem of students not attending because they are not ready when the taxi arrives to collect them from home
 - ensuring that all students who are in residential homes attend regularly
 - improve the internal layout of the building so that it is easier for staff to deal with difficult behaviour.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students begin at Albany with levels of attainment that are well below age-related expectations; their literacy and numeracy skills are weak, especially writing. Most students have large gaps in their prior learning because they have missed school so often due to poor behaviour or attendance. Attitudes to learning are often highly negative by the time students begin at Albany.
- Staff initially work with students to help them to manage their behaviour, try and address their attendance problems, and establish positive attitudes to learning. In effect, they work very effectively to remove the barriers to learning that students have established, often over many years of negative experiences of learning.
- Students currently on roll, including those who have just sat their GCSE examinations, have made good progress over their time at the unit. Boys and girls make good progress in mathematics and often excellent progress in science; this is usually from very low starting points as poor behaviour in the past meant they were often excluded from science lessons. All study GCSE science at the unit and every student achieves a pass grade.
- Good support for reading, including one-to-one tuition, means that students make effective progress in this area. Some students arrive without being able to read and the unit ensures that all are able to read before they leave. Most students' writing skills develops reasonably well but many are somewhat hindered from achieving higher grades in GCSE examinations by not being able to easily produce longer pieces of writing. This is not helped by limited opportunities for practising writing in English and other subjects. Not always being able to express more difficult ideas or explanations in written form also stops some of the more-able students from achieving grade C and above.
- Overall, while attainment remains below national norms, all students leave with a recognised qualification in English and mathematics. Most are entered for GCSEs in English and mathematics and the proportion gaining grades A* to G is nearly always 100%. In addition, students gain a range of other GCSEs, for example, in subjects such as child development and environmental science. The grades achieved by students are improving, with some on track to gain one or more GCSEs at the higher grades. Students also gain a variety of recognised and valuable vocational qualifications. They gain very good skills in carpentry and working with wood in the Zone for Learning, for example.
- The unit uses the pupil premium funding to tailor the curriculum for individual students and to extend the wider curriculum, such as the adventure learning programme. These help to engage students in their learning well and, in turn, enable them to achieve worthwhile skills and qualifications that help them to move successfully on to their next steps in education or training. Students who are eligible for the pupil premium attain as well as others.
- Students' special educational needs are carefully analysed and a wide range of support provided to make the work accessible to students, especially those who have a statement of special educational needs. All students, whatever their special educational needs and whatever the level of need, make equally good progress in their learning.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is typically good. Teachers and learning support assistants manage behaviour well. They establish good working relationships with students. This helps to create a positive working environment and to motivate and enthuse students about their work. Staff also choose effective resources that 'hook' students into learning, and use real-life examples to engage students and excite their curiosity.
- The work provided is well set out. It takes into account what students already know and understand, and where students need to move onto next. Teachers take care to adjust work for different students so that it is challenging but not so hard that they give up. Where teaching is at its most skilled, students begin to set their own questions or challenges. In a mathematics lesson, for example, a student working on percentages answered the teachers' questions on calculating 10% and 20% of a number, set himself the task of finding out how to work out 50%.
- Teachers usually question students effectively in order to find out what they know and to get them to think through their ideas. Students readily proffer answers and the more able are willing to have a go at answering more difficult questions. They are often articulate in their answers.
- Learning support assistants are deployed well in lessons to help keep students well focused on their work. They work very effectively in partnership with teachers; they know where the teacher is taking the lesson and what they want students to get out of the lesson. This helps learning support assistants to ask the right questions when they work with students.
- While teachers provide good ongoing oral feedback, written feedback when work is marked does not always provide students with enough guidance on what they need to do to improve their work. In addition, staff do not ensure that students go back and correct their work, or go over work that needs to be improved.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Students behave well. The unit works very effectively to turn around the previously poor behaviour of students and helps them to work towards managing their own behaviour. Behaviour at the unit has improved since the last inspection; this is evident in the fewer reported incidents and rapidly declining fixed-term exclusions.
- The unit is calm and orderly, and students are polite and helpful. They appreciate what staff do for them and feel that they are treated with respect and as adults. Students form good relationships with one another, and are often very supportive of their peers, helping one another in lessons or when out on adventure learning activities. Bullying is not an issue in the unit and students are confident that any incidents will be promptly addressed by staff.
- Most students develop good habits that will support them in the world of work. Much of this is due to the excellent opportunities for work experience and vocational studies in placements such as the Zone for Learning and Nacro.
- Students make good gains in attendance and punctuality. Attendance rates for individuals improve considerably and, for some, quite dramatically so. The unit challenges parents and carers very robustly where attendance issues persist. However, a few students continue to attend infrequently. One of the most common reasons for non-attendance is that the student is not ready when the taxi arrives and, after waiting, the taxi leaves without the student.

- Attendance has also been an issue for a very small number of students when a residential home does not ensure that looked-after children in its care attend the unit.
- The unit's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Staff and the management committee make sure that students are in good hands when they go off-site or are on work-experience. All placements are thoroughly checked out before any students are sent out to any. In addition, staff at the unit phone daily to check that students have arrived at all off-site placements. They receive regular feedback and reports on progress and behaviour from each.
- Students learn how to keep themselves safe, for example, on the internet. The programme for personal, social and health education covers important topics, such as healthy relationships, prejudice and discrimination, and the impact of racism and homophobia.
- A key element of the unit's work is in developing students' confidence, self-esteem and belief in their own abilities. Activities such as the adventure learning programme make a strong contribution to students' personal development by getting them to try new experiences, such as sailing or rock climbing, tackle their own fears and build confidence and resilience. These, in turn, help students when they are in the classroom to deal with work that is more challenging and from which, in the past, they would have refused to tackle.

The leadership and management are good

- Senior leaders have worked effectively to tackle the issues from the previous inspection. Consequently, they have made considerable progress in improving the quality of teaching and learning, and in establishing thorough methods for reviewing and evaluating the impact of its work. The information from monitoring is used very effectively to inform plans for improvement. This includes using monitoring to identify and then address training needs for staff, and to set relevant, performance targets for all staff on an individual basis.
- The local authority education staff have worked very effectively with the unit and provided strong support to enable it to address the educational issues from the last inspection and subsequent monitoring visit. Input from English and mathematics consultants has been valuable in developing these areas and supporting the English and mathematics leaders.
- While the local authority has helped to improve the premises, the prompt management of students' difficult behaviour or emotional outbursts remains impeded by the layout of the accommodation. Issues beyond the control of the unit's leaders have a negative impact on the attendance and progress of a small number of individuals.
- Lack of equitable funding for the unit compared to some others, a historic situation that the local authority is trying to resolve, makes it difficult for the unit to tackle either the attendance or the building issues without help, advice and support from the local authority.
- The unit has established robust systems for tracking progress and attainment of students. These are used well by senior leaders and subject leaders to keep a close eye on how well students are doing. The roles of subject leaders are developing well and they are checking the impact of the curriculum on students' learning.
- The unit provides a wide ranging curriculum for its students and has plans for developing this further. The range of vocational placements and work experience are extremely well matched to students' needs and are a key factor in the unit's success in enabling all to move onto a relevant course or training post-16. The support students receive after they have left is also vital to the

completion of post-16 courses or training. A 'moving-on' co-ordinator provides detailed, independent advice and guidance to students on careers and future plans.

- The unit works closely with parents and carers. This has helped to improve attendance and attitudes to learning for most. Parents are fulsome in their praise of the unit's success with their child. Partnerships with other schools and local organisations are well developed.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- The management committee provides very effective oversight of the unit's work and is successfully led by the Chair. It is well informed about the progress students are making and the quality of teaching and learning. This is through the comprehensive and clear headteacher's reports to members and also their first-hand visits to the unit. These are organised on a termly basis with a different focus each term. Members are provided with a useful framework for each visit which helps them to ask probing questions and to know what to look for when in the unit
- The management committee keeps a close eye on how money is spent, including linking pay to performance. It knows both how the pupil premium funding is used and how effective this is in helping to improve students' achievement. Members work in close partnership with the unit to plan for its long-term future. There are active discussions and developing plans, for example, about going into collaboration with several other pupil referral units. The management committee is robust in ensuring that safeguarding requirements are met. For example, the Chair of the Management Committee checks that the required checks of all staff working with students are up-to-date.

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	442060

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	30
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Chair	Viv Hughes
Headteacher	Jane Reason
Date of previous school inspection	13 November 2012
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