

The Attic

The Attic Learning Centre, Lovewell Road, Lowestoft, NR33 0RQ

Inspection dates 17–18 September 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
	This inspection:	Requires improvement 3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement 3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement 3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement 3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement 3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement.

- Teaching requires improvement. It is not consistently good across the unit. As a result, pupils' progress and achievement are also inconsistent.
- Some ineffective teaching is having a negative impact on pupils' progress and achievement.
- Work is not always pitched at the right level for pupils. It is too easy at times, especially for more-able pupils, and too hard for the less able.
- The quality of marking and feedback to pupils is variable. They are usually praised for their work but not sufficiently well guided on what they need to do to improve it.
- Support for literacy, including individual support, is not effectively in place to help all pupils improve their skills quickly enough.
- While teaching assistants are enthusiastic and keen to develop further, their roles in classrooms are underdeveloped. The unit has an appraisal system for support staff but last year, the unit's first year of operation, it was not as rigorously applied as the appraisal system for teachers.
- Attendance is low and this has had a negative impact on the learning and academic achievement of a minority with poor attendance records.
- While the unit is developing the range of courses offered to pupils, this is not as broad as it could be or tailored to individuals, especially in terms of vocational opportunities.
- Structures for leading and managing subjects have not been fully established.

The school has the following strengths

- The headteacher, deputy headteacher and the management committee have set clear and high expectations for the work of the unit. They have an accurate understanding of how well the unit is developing and take firm action to tackle issues of underperformance. Hence, the unit is improving and its capacity to improve further is good.
- Pupils are happy and feel safe both in the unit and when involved in off-site activities. The positive atmosphere promotes good relationships between pupils and staff, and among pupils themselves. Consequently, pupils' personal development improves, they grow in confidence and most are keen to do well.
- Nearly all Year 11 pupils who left the unit last year moved on to appropriate and relevant further education or training courses. In addition, a good proportion of younger pupils were successfully returned to mainstream schools.
- The unit has established a comprehensive system for assessing pupils' academic and personal development when they join the unit. Consequently, teachers are now being given good quality information on which to plan their lessons.
- The local authority provides strong support; it has, for example, helped the unit to radically improve the accommodation, including facilities for teaching science.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector carried out four lesson observations and a number of shorter observations, one of which was conducted jointly with the headteacher. The strategy for observation was discussed and agreed with the headteacher.
- Observations of teaching included one-to-one sessions at the Walpole Learning Centre where a small number of pupils are based.
- A joint visit with the headteacher was made to a centre providing vocational training to some of the unit's Key Stage 4 students.
- The inspector held meetings with the headteacher, the Chair and Vice Chair of the management committee, a representative from the local authority, teachers and support staff.
- Discussions were held with pupils informally as well as through a meeting with four Key Stage 4 students.
- The unit was part of a pilot where parents were invited to provide written comments alongside the Ofsted online questionnaire (Parent View). However, no parents completed the survey, and therefore, no written comments were provided.
- The inspector took account of six Ofsted questionnaires completed by staff.
- The 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 unit caters for up to 40 pupils aged eight to 16 living in the northern part of Suffolk who have been excluded from school due to their poor behaviour. A small number have medical needs. At the time of the inspection, there were no Key Stage 2 pupils on roll and only a very small number of Key Stage 3 pupils.
- The Attic was registered on the 1st September 2013 with the Department for Education as a pupil referral unit following reorganisation locally of five former establishments all of which were on different sites.
- The unit now works from two sites, 20 miles apart. The main site is in Lowestoft, where most pupils are based, and the second site is in Walpole, near Halesworth, within the Walpole Learning Centre. A number of pupils access sessions on both sites. The unit also provides some outreach work to pupils in their homes or at other placements.
- Pupils join the unit throughout the year as it has the responsibility locally to provide education to all who are excluded within six days of the exclusion.
- The unit also has a responsibility to reintegrate as many pupils back to mainstream school as possible, especially those in Key Stages 2 and 3. Pupils, therefore, leave throughout the year as and when they are ready to go back into mainstream education.
- Typically all, or nearly all, pupils come from White British backgrounds. There are more boys than girls in the unit.
- All pupils are supported at school action plus or have a statement of special educational needs, primarily for behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. Many pupils also have additional needs such as moderate learning difficulties, or specific difficulties such as dyslexia or autism spectrum disorders.
- The unit does not currently receive any pupil premium funding, which is additional government funding for children in the care of the local authority and pupils known to be eligible for free school meals. It is due to receive this from the end of October 2014. The numbers of pupils known to be eligible for a free school meal and/or to be in the care of the local authority are relatively high. All pupils are provided with a meal at lunch times.
- The unit uses off-site provision for vocational training and accredited courses for Key Stage 4 pupils. The main provider is Breakout in Lowestoft. Pupils also go off-site for physical activities such as water sports. The unit does not receive any primary school physical education and sport funding (additional government funding to encourage primary-aged pupils to become active and healthy).
- While the unit has not had a full Ofsted inspection before, it did have an Ofsted monitoring visit in October 2013 following concerns about the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements in some of Suffolk's alternative provisions. This monitoring visit found that safeguarding procedures at the Attic met requirements.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching and raise achievement by making sure that:
 - teachers make effective use of assessment information to set work at the right level for different pupils
 - teaching assistants are supported through appraisal to develop all the skills they need and are used effectively in lessons to support pupils' learning
 - teachers provide pupils with clear guidance on how to improve their work.
- Develop pupils' literacy so that they make more consistent progress in English by:
 - making sure they have enough opportunities to write at length
 - establishing a system across the whole unit for supporting individual pupils to close gaps in their literacy skills or help with specific literacy difficulties.

- Raise attendance levels by:
 - ensuring that the new systems and strategies for managing attendance, such as key worker roles in monitoring attendance, are used effectively to swiftly highlight and address issues of attendance
 - developing more tailored, vocational options to encourage attendance, especially for those who find academic work difficult.

- Improve leadership and management by establishing an effective subject leadership structure that works across both sites.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management requires improvement

- The unit's leadership has established effective systems to support its work. However, some of these are at early stages of implementation. As a result, it is too early to judge their full impact, particularly on pupils' achievement.
- While the management committee and senior leadership roles are well developed, a structure for subject leadership has not been as effectively established. For example, teachers on the two sites teaching the same subject are tending to work individually, though they are beginning to collaborate more with the support of local authority subject consultants.
- The curriculum is developing well but is not fully tailored to pupils' needs, abilities and interests, especially in terms of support for pupils' literacy needs and establishing a wider vocational offer. That said, the vocational opportunities secured to date are of high quality. The availability of a range of GCSE courses this academic year is a positive step in meeting the needs of more-able pupils but there is room for these to be broadened further.
- The unit has established an effective mechanism for assessing pupils thoroughly when they arrive. This is done through what is called the 'assessment centre'. The centre is providing a wide range of information on pupils' academic, social and personal development to teachers and support staff. This is beginning to be used by teachers to pitch work more effectively at the right level for pupils.
- Pupils' progress is tracked carefully and analysed, including looking for any patterns in achievement. Key workers are now attached to individual pupils to monitor and check their progress, behaviour and attendance. Pupil groups are reviewed to ensure that the teaching groups work effectively. A Key Stage 4 GCSE group has been formed this year as a result of reviewing the provision for more-able pupils.
- The headteacher has successfully brought together staff from five former establishments and created an effective team around her. Checking of the quality of the unit's work is both rigorous and accurate. Consequently, teaching has improved and most of the inadequate teaching has been eliminated. While teaching requires improvement, teachers are receiving regular, accurate and constructive feedback on their work with clear guidance and support for improvement. Ineffective performance is dealt with firmly.
- Pupils are provided with helpful careers guidance and effective support for their next steps in education. They also receive good support for personal, social and health education. In addition, a range of enrichment and off-site activities, including physical activities, help to support pupils' spiritual, moral and social development. Pupils enjoy the sporting activities provided and are developing more active and healthier lifestyles.
- Close work with the local authority has secured its good support, including funding, for the unit and for implementation of new National Curriculum and assessment requirements. The local authority support has had a positive impact in getting the unit off the ground.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The management committee ensures that it carries out its statutory duties. Members are well informed about the unit's work through, for example, detailed reports produced by the headteacher. This enables members to ask searching questions and to keep track of developments to improve provision and outcomes. They analyse data on pupils' progress and attainment, as well as attendance and behaviour. Members of the management committee are involved well in setting priorities and checking how well these are being addressed by the unit. The Chair of the Management Committee works very effectively with the headteacher to set the right tone and communicate the members' high expectations of performance. This has been key in establishing a new unit and bringing together staff from five different former institutions.
 - Members of the committee have worked with the headteacher and deputy headteacher to deal firmly with performance that is not good enough. Members are in the process of reviewing the first set of data

and information from teachers' performance management so that they can take fair decisions on pay, based on performance. They have discussed, with the headteacher, how the pupil premium will be used when the unit receives this funding. Members ensure that safeguarding requirements are met. The management committee, working with the unit, has engaged with a wide range of stakeholders and the committee is broadening to become representative of these. However, members have had difficulty in securing parent representation on the management committee and realise they need to think more radically, which they are beginning to do, to include parental voice on the committee.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

requires improvement

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement because of low attendance and some issues in pupils' behaviour for learning. For example, they are reliant on teachers to help them and less good at persevering and working things out for themselves. Many are not becoming more resilient; they give up too quickly, sometimes before they have started.
- Attendance last year was affected by vocational provision off-site that pupils did not enjoy or engage with sufficiently well. A different provider is now being used, and attendance is checked rigorously and daily. Much work has been done with parents to reinforce the importance of sending their children to school. There are signs that it is improving, taking into account genuine illness. However, it remains low. Key workers attached to each pupil are responsible for monitoring attendance and behaviour, as well as academic development. This is a new system so it is too early to have had impact.
- Most pupils improve their behaviour. Behaviour records indicate that the majority of issues tend to be low level, such as not following unit rules or refusing to follow instructions. Staff deal with these effectively in most cases. Major incidents are rare, as are bullying and behaviour that is discriminatory such as racism or homophobia. Exclusions are kept to a minimum, with staged sanctions to turn around poor behaviour.
- Pupils are taught key British values such as tolerance and respect for others, including those with different beliefs or cultural backgrounds. Daily reading of newspapers as part of the start to the day on both sites helps to identify current issues and encourage discussion and debate. This also helps with developing pupils' literacy skills.
- Pupils like the way that they are treated at the unit and feel that they are listened to. The change in the timetable this year, with academic work in the morning and activities and practical work in the afternoon, came about as a result of consultation with pupils.
- The vast majority of pupils are keen to do well, though they are not always willing to admit this. They value the opportunity to complete their education and to move successfully onto their next step in life. From discussions and observations, it is clear that pupils engage particularly well when involved in practical work and activities. Staff made a similar observation.
- The unit's work to keep pupils' safe is good. This includes checking the suitability of adults to work with pupils, both in the unit and at the off-site provision.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teaching requires improvement because not enough of it is good. In addition, there is still a small amount of inadequate teaching which the unit's leaders are working to eradicate.
- Where teaching is not good enough, work is often either too easy for more-able pupils or too hard for lower attainers. This is because, in these cases, teachers are not taking enough account of assessment information to inform their planning. Sometimes, pupils find work too difficult because it has not been broken down and explained properly or presented in a practical enough way to help them understand key ideas.

- At times, when looking through pupils' books, it is difficult to see how the work provided moves pupils on in a systematic and logically sequential way. For example, one pupil's English exercise book contained a long, written piece of work, followed by many activities that required one word or short answers. These demanded considerably less skill than shown in the earlier, lengthy piece of writing.
- While work is marked in most cases, the quality of marking is variable. Encouraging comments and praise help to instil confidence in pupils, but teachers' comments do not focus enough on providing pupils with guidance on their next steps or what they need to do to improve their work.
- Teachers do not make the fullest use of teaching assistants to support them and pupils' learning. Teaching assistants are not always confident in the subject they are supporting. They are, therefore, sometimes quicker to intervene when behaviour is an issue than when pupils get stuck with their work.
- When teaching assistants are confident, they promote pupils' learning effectively. For example, a teaching assistant worked with pupil on cooking pasta. She skilfully engaged the pupil in reading instructions and in working out how much pasta to cook, thus reinforcing basic literacy and numeracy skills well.
- Teachers are beginning to make better use of assessment information to help them plan work at the right level for the pupils they are teaching. Their questioning of pupils is generally effective in finding out what they know and helping them to understand new work. In the best lessons, questioning is skilled and helps to establish deeper learning.
- Lessons begin briskly and behaviour is not allowed to get in the way of learning. Teachers and teaching assistants work hard to establish good relationships with pupils which helps to motivate them.
- Teachers pay good attention to key vocabulary to help pupils to understand their work and extend their literacy. Resources, such as computers and interactive whiteboards, are used well to help pupils' learning.
- Practical approaches, when used, help pupils grasp important ideas effectively. For example, in a science lesson, the teacher made good use of large rings and small cups to help pupils to create atoms of different sizes and see how atoms of different elements bond together to form a compound.

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Pupils usually arrive at the unit with low levels of attainment for their ages. They tend to have gaps in their learning due to poor attendance or behaviour, or a combination of these. A few have had very little education in the mainstream and missed considerable amounts of their schooling. Hence, literacy and numeracy skills tend to be low, and especially so in literacy. A very small number of pupils demonstrate higher levels of ability.
- Last year, Year 11 pupils attained a range of qualifications such as entry levels in literacy, numeracy and science. Pupils were entered for GCSE mathematics and most achieved a pass grade. However, by the time the unit was accepted as an examination centre, it was too late to put pupils in for GCSEs in other subjects. A number of Year 11 pupils had also joined the unit late in the year. A couple of pupils were able to sit some GCSEs in the mainstream schools they had come from.
- The unit's records show that progress was mixed last year, with some pupils having made good progress while others were less successful. Reading and spelling test results, as well as teacher assessments, reflect a similar picture. The unit provides daily opportunities for reading in the mornings and this helps with both social and personal development as well as giving pupils greater confidence in their reading. However, the unit has not established a more systematic approach across the whole unit to helping individual pupils to learn to improve specific elements of their literacy.
- Analysis of books and observations confirm that current progress is mixed, and not consistently good. Pupils make better progress in reading than in writing, especially younger pupils as they receive some targeted support to improve reading such as help with letters and sounds (phonics). Pupils' work books indicate that there are not enough opportunities for writing at length or practising writing skills to develop

accurate grammar, punctuation and spelling. Progress is also inconsistent in mathematics.

- There are no significant differences between different groups, though girls currently in the unit tend to be better at expressing their ideas in writing but less confident in mathematics. More-able pupils now have the opportunity to take up to five GCSEs in Key Stage 4 and this is a positive move to help them to secure better achievement by the end of the year. However, they are not consistently challenged in lessons, especially in mathematics.
- Pupils are generally making better progress in science. They are also developing good skills in practical areas such as art, and vocationally orientated activities such as art and design and resistant materials at Breakout.
- Over the time that pupils are in the unit, they are making reasonably good progress in improving their personal development and their skills for future life, including the world of work. Behaviour improves and pupils learn to successfully manage their own behaviour. These factors have helped the unit to reintegrate a good number of pupils back into mainstream schools, as well as securing places on post-16 education and training courses.

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	140121
Local authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	447875

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	8–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	22
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Chair	
Headteacher	Ms Judith Sherington
Date of previous school inspection	N/A
Telephone number	01502 565646
Fax number	01502 674951
Email address	admin@theattic.suffolk.sch.uk

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'raising concerns and making complaints about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.



You can use Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school. Ofsted will use the information parents and carers provide when deciding which schools to inspect and when and as part of the inspection.

You can also use Parent View to find out what other parents and carers think about schools in England. You can visit www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk, or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

[Piccadilly Gate](#)
[Store St](#)
[Manchester](#)
[M1 2WD](#)

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

© Crown copyright 2014

