

The St Aubyn Centre Therapeutic Education Department

The St Aubyn Centre, Colchester, CO4 5HG

Inspection dates 12–13 November 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Sixth form provision		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- The very highest expectations, strong relationships between staff and students, and a 'can do' approach underpin the success of the unit. A profound understanding of the mental health needs of students, coupled with the unit's informed and therapeutic approach to their education, cements this success.
- The head of education and the Chair of the management committee work together in a strong and purposeful partnership based on the belief that supporting students to continue, or re-focus on their learning has a beneficial impact on their mental health recovery. Consequently, the collaboration and communication between the medical and educational staff is outstanding.
- The head of education provides inspirational leadership which is both insightful and uncompromising in its aspiration to elicit the absolute best out of staff and students. Hence, the educational provision and outcomes have improved significantly since the last inspection.
- The unit now has a strong leadership team which works exceptionally effectively to promote high achievement. Members of the management committee are actively engaged in the unit's work. They provide a very well balanced combination of encouraging support and challenge to leaders to make the unit even better.
- Students achieve outstandingly well. It takes time to enable most of those who are admitted to re-engage with their education. Once they do, they are highly positive about their learning.
- Teachers meticulously identify the gaps in students' previous learning when they arrive. Staff plan work on an individual basis to help address these gaps. This enables students to move forward in their learning at a rapid pace. As a result, virtually all students gain valuable qualifications, GCSEs, AS and A levels or equivalent in most cases. Almost all gain recognised accreditation for English and mathematics.
- The provision in the sixth form is outstanding. Many post-16 students had stopped going to school, thinking that their education was over. Staff work with them to help find relevant courses, including routes into further and higher education.
- Students behave outstandingly well. The view, as expressed by one former student that 'this place saved me', is echoed by many others in the letters and notes they write when leaving. The unit is a place of safety for students, a haven where they can express their feelings and emotions without fear because they are listened to and understood.
- Exceptionally strong partnerships with other schools and colleges result in a wide range of benefits for students, the unit itself and other institutions.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector carried out observations of four lessons or part lessons taught during the inspection. She also sampled a wide range of small group sessions and one-to-one tuition provided by staff. Most of these observations were conducted jointly with the head of education.
- The inspector held meetings with the head of education, the deputy head of education, members of the management committee including the Chair, a representative from the local authority, the education department's school improvement adviser, and other teachers and support staff with responsibilities.
- Meetings were held with students, including two former students. Many informal discussions also took place with students during visits to lessons. The unit's records of feedback from students and their parents were examined.
- The unit was part of a pilot where parents and carers were invited to provide written comments alongside the Ofsted online questionnaire (Parent View). However, only two parents and carers completed the survey and none provided written comments. The education department arranged meetings between the inspector and the parents of two students.
- The inspector took account of 14 Ofsted questionnaires completed by staff.
- The lead inspector observed the work of the education department. She looked at its 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 information relating to students' attainment and progress, and records of behaviour and attendance.

Inspection team

Gulshanbir Kayembe, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The St Aubyn Centre Therapeutic Educational Department is a small specialist education provision for up to 25 young people with mental health difficulties. Shortly after the last inspection it moved into new, purpose-built accommodation sited within the new in-patient hospital for young people with mental health needs.
- The age range has changed since the last inspection when it was 11 to 18 years. It is now 13 to 18 years and, typically, the unit has few students who are in Key Stage 3. During the inspection, all were in Key Stage 4 or post-16, and the majority were in Year 11.
- Many of the young people who are post-16, when admitted are not in education, employment or training.
- The hospital has two wards. Longview is a general, adolescent psychiatric ward while Larkwood is an adolescent psychiatric intensive care unit. At the time of the last inspection, there was only one ward, Longview.
- All young people on Larkwood ward, and some on Longview are detained under the Mental Health Act 1983.
- Students of all ages are taught together, though there are separate teaching areas for students on Larkwood and Longview. Some young people, when they are better but not well enough to be discharged, move from Larkwood to Longview.
- Difficulties suffered by young people include depression, suicidal tendencies, psychosis, obsessive compulsive disorder and anorexia nervosa. They are usually very unwell when admitted.
- Young people are admitted to the hospital and, therefore join the unit throughout the year. The length of stay varies from a few days to over a year. Sometimes, young people are re-admitted.
- Last academic year, of the 79 students taught in the unit, 34% were discharged within six weeks.
- Students on Longview ward come mostly from the East of England. Those on Larkwood can come from anywhere in the country.
- Typically most students are from White British backgrounds. There are significantly more girls than boys.
- All students are supported at school action plus. A small number have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan.
- The majority of students remain registered with their mainstream school with the aim of reintegrating them back to their home schools when they are well enough.
- A below average proportion, about a fifth, of students are eligible for 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. However, this funding usually remains in the school's students were attending when admitted to St Aubyn. It is sometimes passed on retrospectively. Last year the education department received £900 retrospectively.
- The unit does not use any alternative providers.
- The unit has a delegated budget which means that it manages its own budget rather than this being done by the local authority.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Put in place a more suitable system for tracking students' achievement so that it gives a more comprehensive and accurate picture of their progress.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The unit owes its success to the high quality of leadership because this promotes a culture where staff and students can be reflective about how they are working. There is strong emphasis on knowing the mental health needs of students and understanding the impact these have on their learning. There is an equally focused approach to look beyond these to students' educational needs and re-orientate students, and motivate them, to concentrate on their learning. In effect, the leadership has very effectively created a culture where excellent teaching, learning and behaviour flourish.
- The leadership of teaching is strong and begins with recruitment and selection so that those offered posts have the right skills and abilities to work successfully with the students in the unit. Teaching is checked rigorously and high quality feedback provided to support continued improvement. Professional development opportunities are exceptionally good and robustly linked to the needs of individual members of staff, as well as the needs of the unit and students. Leaders are insightful in looking beyond the unit to develop staff expertise, for example by working very closely with a local secondary school to widen the range of training opportunities available for staff.
- Since the last inspection, the unit has established a very effective leadership structure which has included appointing subject leaders as well as a deputy head of education. These leaders are making a very positive contribution to the development of the unit and its educational provision.
- Students' progress and attainment are very carefully monitored to ensure that all are achieving as well as they can. Their mental health is also checked very carefully and this helps staff to put in the right strategies to support students' learning. The unit is in the process of moving to a different method of tracking achievement but this is not fully established. The current system, which is used by mainstream schools is not flexible enough for the needs of the unit. For example, during difficult periods when a students' mental health deteriorates temporarily, keeping the student from falling behind is a significant achievement. On the system, however, it looks as if no progress has been made.
- Leaders check that no group, including disadvantaged students is underachieving. The small amount of pupil premium funding that has been received has been used well but, more importantly the unit's own resources are exceptionally well used to provide individually tailored programmes of study for all. Hence, equality of opportunity is outstandingly well promoted for all groups of students. Those eligible for pupil premium achieve as well as others.
- Subject expertise within the unit has improved substantially as a result of the unit's recruitment strategy. Consequently, a wide range of Key Stage 4 and sixth form courses, including GCSE and A level courses, are taught in the unit. Teachers are willing to learn new skills and subjects to help students with their studies. Resources and support from the students' mainstream schools are also accessed to support their learning. For example, teachers from mainstream schools are facilitated to provide tuition to individual pupils in a specific subject where this expertise is not available in the unit. Overall, the curriculum is excellent in both the breadth and the depth of subjects provided.
- Students have very good opportunities for off-site activities, especially those on Longview ward. This includes geocaching (an outdoor recreational activity using a global positioning system receiver to hide and seek containers), forest schools and a range of sporting activities. Those in Larkwood can join in with these off-site activities depending on their mental health needs and the leave they are allocated. Activities such as art, singing, cooking and a therapy dog session are provided on-site so that all students are able to experience wider curricular enrichment much of which is highly therapeutic. Consequently, it is helpful in improving students' mental and physical health.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted exceptionally through the curriculum, especially through the personal, social and health education programme. Topics such as racism and homophobia are covered, for example. Displays show coverage of Black History month, Remembrance Day and the birthday of Guru Nanak. The Friday sessions on the news, national and international, pick up topical issues. Overall, the unit prepares students very well for a life in modern Britain. Excellent information, advice and guidance are provided to students on their next steps in

education and future life.

- The local authority provides 'light touch' support and has had a positive impact on the development of the unit and its educational provision. It provides a useful sounding board for unit leaders to assess their own practice and effectiveness, and to identify where there is any room for improvement.
- Parents and mainstream schools and colleges are fulsome in their praise of the work of the unit. Parents feel they are very well informed about the progress of their children. Staff from schools talk about the careful support the unit provides for reintegration. Even after students have left the unit, the mainstream schools to which they go are able to seek advice on how best to support them. Partnerships with nursing, medical staff and therapists are exceptional.

■ The governance of the school:

- Governance is outstanding. The Chair of the management committee has a clear vision of the future direction of the unit. He understands the importance of the educational provision to the recovery of students' mental health and, as a senior clinician has worked very effectively with the head of education to establish the strong partnership between medical and educational staff.
- Members of the management committee are actively involved in the work of the unit. For example, they were closely involved in the design of the new hospital and education unit. In addition, the member with responsibility for safeguarding carries out regular audits of how well this is going and provides feedback to the full committee. The management committee ensures that all safeguarding requirements are met.
- Members are drawn from a wide range of backgrounds, clinical, educational and community; they include a parent or carer representative and representatives of local schools and sixth form colleges. They are, therefore, very well placed to question leaders about the unit's effectiveness. Members are very well informed about staff and the quality of teaching, and link pay awards well to performance. They know how well different groups are doing and understand how to interpret the unit's data on student performance. The management committee sees the benefits for the unit in establishing its own system for analysing student progress. They understand that it would give a more rounded and accurate picture of performance and a student's learning journey through the ups and downs of mental health recovery.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

are outstanding

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is outstanding. They involve themselves exceptionally well in their learning, especially when they are feeling well. As they begin to get better, they become increasingly absorbed and immersed in study. The atmosphere in lessons is purposeful and calm. Even when students are not too well or have had a difficult night, they attend and make strong efforts to engage with their academic work. This is reflected in the high levels of attendance. The improvement in students' attendance, compared with when they were in mainstream education, is considerable. The occasional post-16 student attending a college placement is very well monitored so that any issues in attendance, progress or behaviour are picked up very quickly and addressed.
- Staff provide a consistent set of expectations which help to create a stable environment for students within which they are clear about the rules and routines. When students arrive, they are not often in the right frame of mind to engage with their education. Many do not see any future for themselves or have lost all hope of one. With sensitive help and support, they begin to reframe their thinking and to feel that they have something to look forward to when they leave. The education they are receiving makes a significant contribution to this. Students are highly positive about the work of the unit and how it has helped them to improve their work and rebuild their lives.
- Students are very empathetic towards one another and support one another well. When working together they share ideas and make helpful suggestions to one another. During the wider curricular activities, such as singing or creating an obstacle course for the therapy dog, students become totally absorbed in what they are doing. Their enjoyment in these situations is palpable.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding. Staff establish highly positive relationships with students and these help them to feel very safe and cared for. Students themselves say that they feel safe and parents and carers agree. Students also say that they feel a lot safer here than in they did in their mainstream schools.
- Students are taught about the dangers of the internet and social media. This is very difficult for some who have already, before being admitted, found themselves in unsafe situations when online. Staff manage this with great sensitivity. Students are taught about the negative impact of bullying, including on the internet, and bullying based on someone's background, such as race or sexual orientation. Students feel that bullying does not happen in the unit and that staff are vigilant about the use of inappropriate or discriminatory language. No form of discrimination is tolerated. Students feel confident to speak to a member of staff should they have concerns about themselves or others.
- Considerable care is taken of students and their health and safety is paramount. All staff are very well trained to deal with any disclosures that students might make, or to support and help them should they feel so low that they might be tempted to self-harm. The handover meetings each morning provide an excellent briefing about events in the two wards the night before. They enable education staff to be alerted early about any difficulties a student may have during the day as a result of an unsettled or hard night.

The quality of teaching

is outstanding

- The high quality of teaching plays a significant role in enabling students to make outstanding progress in their learning. Excellent relationships and carefully judged levels of challenge are key hallmarks of the exceptional teaching. The success and pleasure students gain from learning has the added benefit of contributing to the recovery of their mental health.
- A significant strength of the teaching is the high quality of subject knowledge that teachers bring to their teaching. This is used to probe students' understanding and to deepen it. Teachers' confidence in their subject also means that they respond flexibly to students; for example, they have the ability to explore in-depth a question that a student might raise or draw out a key resource to aid deeper understanding.
- Work is planned on an individual basis and tailored closely to students' capabilities and next steps in learning. Teachers are expert in assessing students' depth of understanding. This enables them to identify the gaps in prior learning and where exactly a key idea or concept has not been well enough understood. Teachers use the information from assessment to plug gaps, address any misconceptions and establish firm foundations for future learning.
- Support staff are deployed to very good effect to provide additional help and guidance. They are very well briefed about the work and what it is that each student needs to learn. They establish equally strong relationships with students and this helps them to strengthen students' engagement in learning.
- Literacy and numeracy are outstandingly well taught so that students develop strong basic skills and extend these to reach good levels of development in mathematics and English. A love of literature is nurtured exceptionally well. Many who found mathematics difficult in the past come to enjoy it because they begin to understand mathematical ideas. Teachers promote this understanding highly effectively by making the work practical and helping students to think for themselves.
- Teachers and support staff provide on-going feedback to students as they work and this helps students to improve continuously. Written feedback is sharply focused so that it brings out key and specific learning points. It is clear from students' books that these comments make a significant and positive impact on driving students' learning.

The achievement of pupils is outstanding

- When students begin at the unit, many have had a fractured experience of education due to their mental health. Gaps in learning due to poor health, attendance and exclusion in mainstream institutions are common. In some cases, students are so unwell or have become so disaffected with education that even minimal engagement in education is a significant step forward. The full range of abilities is represented in the unit and many students are very capable though rarely functioning at the levels of attainment they are capable of when they start here.
- As staff skilfully re-engage students in their learning, their progress and achievement begin to accelerate. Over the time that students are in the unit, they make significant progress in their learning. Gaps in prior learning are narrowed or closed and students become increasingly confident in their work.
- The unit prepares students exceptionally well for GCSEs and A levels or equivalent qualifications, such as health and social care at levels 2 and 3. Consequently, they achieve outstandingly well when they take these either in their home schools or in the unit. A high proportion of those entered for GCSEs in English and mathematics gain grades A* to C and the more-able students gain A grades. Overall, more able students achieve exceptionally well given their starting points, usually gaining a range of GCSEs at A* to C, including in science, to enable them to move onto A level or equivalent courses post-16. The unit does not enter students early for GCSE examinations.
- Alternative qualifications, including in English and mathematics are provided for some students and they are highly successful in gaining accreditation in these. This is particularly helpful for post-16 students who were not in education, employment or training when they arrived and who have little in the way of prior qualifications. Consequently, these students are very well prepared for moving onto further education or training.
- Students' books and lessons reflect the enormous progress they are making. Art displays around the unit reflect the high level of achievement in this subject. Students' regular access to information and communication technology means that they are skilled in using computers to support them with work across the curriculum.
- There are no differences in the achievement or attainment of students based on their background. Disadvantaged students achieve and attain as well as others. Resources in the unit are targeted as required to help all students to achieve their very best. The very best that any student can achieve is linked more closely to their mental health condition than any other factor. Where staff can make a difference, including to the mental health of a student through the way they work with the student and in stimulating interest, they do so highly successfully. The small number of boys are as successful as the girls.
- The unit enables the large majority of students to return to mainstream education or training, such as apprenticeships and to reintegrate successfully. Students' strong learning and progress at the unit are sustained in mainstream through the careful and significant support provided as part of the reintegration process. A few students move onto other units or adult mental health services due to the more serious nature of their mental health conditions.

The sixth form provision is outstanding

- The provision for students is exceptionally well led. A key to the success of the sixth form is the development of a wide range of partnerships with colleges and schools in Essex and Suffolk. These enable the unit to find the right course or courses for individual students to move onto when they are ready to re-enter mainstream education. Where students are dual registered, the unit works very closely with each student's mainstream school to the benefit of the student's learning and achievement.
- Behaviour is exceptionally good and students are very safe.

- Students achieve outstandingly well across a wide range of courses and subjects. Accreditation ranges from academic A levels to vocational courses at an equivalent level or alternative qualifications. Students are given opportunities to achieve a GCSE in English or mathematics if they have not gained a grade C or better in one or both or to gain an alternative literacy and/or numeracy qualification.
- Teaching is outstanding. As with younger students, teachers' subject knowledge is key in helping students to make significant progress in their courses. Teachers question students exceptionally well, probing their understanding and deepening it further by making them think. Able students are thoughtfully challenged to reach high levels of attainment.
- There is strong emphasis on preparing students for the future. The quality of advice and guidance on future careers, university courses and the qualifications needed for these is excellent. Students' views and interests are taken closely into account when advising them. The unit is very good at sourcing the right future placement, including finding appropriate apprenticeships. This helps students to see a future for themselves and, in turn, this has a positive impact on mental health.
- The large majority of students move onto further or higher education, or training. The majority of students who were not in education, employment or training when they arrived move on successfully to placements in college or training. Some move into adult mental health services because they are not well enough. Very few leave with no future placement. This is a significant achievement given the complex needs of students.

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	134260
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	448008

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	13–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	23
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	12
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Nigel Hughes
Headteacher	Gill Jackson
Date of previous school inspection	11 January 2012
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