

Alternative Curriculum Service

The Porch, Richmond House, Bath Road, Newbury, RG14 1QY

Inspection dates 5–6 February 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Sixth form provision		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The leadership of the headteacher is good. With skill and commitment, she has re-focused the whole school on teaching, students' learning and achievement.
- These improvements have been very well managed and all staff are involved. So the school's capacity to improve further is strong.
- Leadership at all levels has improved and is now good. New subject leaders have been appointed and are fully focused on maintaining high standards in their subject. There is clarity of purpose; one subject leader said, 'I know perfectly what my job is'.
- The school is very effective in commissioning high quality alternative provision from Outdoor Academy. Experiences, courses, trips and residentials are finely tuned to students' needs and play a key role in building their self-esteem and raising achievement.
- Students' behaviour is good. They concentrate well in lessons and are focused on their learning. Their conduct around the school is good. They feel safe in school.
- Teaching is now good as a result of effective leadership. Teachers have high expectations and plan very interesting activities with high quality resources. Students enjoy their lessons and learn well.
- Achievement is good because of improved teaching. In 2014 students made better progress than in previous years and students' overall achievement at GCSE is better than the national picture for similar students.
- The sixth form is good. The vision and determination of the headteacher has enabled this pioneering provision to flourish. It makes a valuable contribution to the diversity of post-16 education in the area and has a growing reputation in the community.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- There is a little inconsistency in learning expectations across different subjects.
- Occasionally teachers rush through activities at speed and so do not always deepen students' understanding as well as they could.
- The leadership of the sixth form is still in the process of developing a distinct vision and character.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector visited the three centres of the Alternative Curriculum Service and the Outdoor Academy.
- Seven lessons were observed, all of which were joint observations with senior leaders.
- A range of students' work was reviewed from different subjects and from all centres.
- The inspector scrutinised a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation, information about students' progress and achievement and records of safeguarding, behaviour and attendance.
- Groups of students from all centres talked to the inspector about their views of the school, including former sixth form students.
- Meetings were held with senior leaders, subject leaders and the special educational needs coordinator.
- Meetings were held with the Chair and other members of the management committee, the local authority representative and the local authority adviser for post-16 education. A telephone conversation was held with the school improvement partner.
- There were too few responses to the online Parent View questionnaire for these to be considered. However, the inspector considered the results of the school's parent survey and spoke to a parent who was visiting the school.
- There were 31 responses to the staff questionnaire which were taken into account.

Inspection team

Janet Hallett, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Alternative Curriculum Service is a pupil referral unit for students between the ages of 14 and 19. Students are referred to the unit from schools across West Berkshire because they are at risk of being excluded or have been permanently excluded from mainstream secondary schools. Some students have had their secondary schooling severely disrupted for a variety of reasons and are referred directly by the local authority. Referrals take place through a placement panel.
- The school currently provides education for 50 students in three centres. There are currently 39 students between the ages of 14 and 16; their education is provided at The Porch and Bridgeway in Newbury and at Badgers Hill in Calcot, near Reading.
- There are currently 11 students in the sixth form; their education is provided at The Porch.
- The proportion of disadvantaged students supported by the pupil premium (additional government funding for students known to be eligible for free school meals and looked after children) is well above average. There are a few looked after children.
- The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs is higher than average.
- The school uses alternative provision at Outdoor Academy in Ufton Nervet. All students between the ages of 14 and 16 attend Outdoor Academy where they have access to a range of outdoor sports and vocational qualifications and support with GCSEs. Sixth formers have the option to attend as part of their programme.
- The school works closely with the re-integration service, which supports students returning to mainstream schooling. Both institutions have the same management committee.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further develop the leadership of the sixth form in order to establish a unique character and identity for this aspect of the school's work and so continue to raise students' achievement.
- Improve teaching and so raise achievement by ensuring that:
 - all subject areas have consistently high expectations of students' learning
 - all teachers adapt the pace of their lessons to ensure that students deepen their learning and understanding.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The leadership and management are good. Since the last inspection the headteacher has focused in a calm and carefully planned manner on what needed to be done to improve teaching and achievement. This has ensured that the changes which have been introduced are not quick fixes but are designed to have a lasting and successful impact for students, now and into the future.
- Teaching is very well led. Aspects of teaching have been clearly identified as priorities through the school's self-evaluation, and training has been put in place to provide support for teachers and teaching assistants. Some training is led by school staff and staff also attend external courses. There are developing links with secondary schools to standardise assessments of students' work.
- Subject leaders, who have all been appointed since the last inspection, work successfully together with senior staff to monitor the quality of teaching. Lesson observations, shorter visits to lessons and scrutinies of students' work take place regularly. Leaders' high expectations of staff are clear.
- Curriculum folders are used very well to focus on achievement for all students and ensure equal opportunities .
- The system for performance management is a model of good practice and successfully brings together the individual training needs of staff with the priorities for school improvement. There is a secure link between teachers' pay progression and students' progress.
- Progress monitoring and work scrutinies are used effectively to assess the impact of teaching. A new system of tracking students' progress has been introduced, which is fit for purpose and meets the needs of the school. All teachers have access to this and it is increasingly used to analyse students' achievement in a variety of different ways to check that no groups are falling behind.
- The curriculum focuses on enabling students to catch up in English, mathematics and science so that they are well prepared for the next stage of their education. This is supplemented by a range of other subjects such as art, photography, geography, and personal, social and health education and a range of vocational awards and qualifications. Students are well prepared for life in modern Britain and the school promotes British values, including respect and tolerance for different faiths and cultures.
- Students' behaviour, attendance and progress at the alternative provision are good and very effectively monitored. Record keeping and communication between the centres and Outdoor Academy is highly effective. Teaching quality is monitored by joint observations with unit and centre staff.
- The school makes very good use of its pupil premium funding and as a result eligible students achieve well.
- Students have access to high quality, unbiased careers advice and guidance through the Connexions service. They are well supported by school staff to write their curriculum vitae for employment and college applications. The proportion of students leaving for employment, education and training has increased every year since the previous inspection.
- The level of care for students is high. All adults in the school work together to ensure the very best outcomes for the students.
- The school meets all the requirements for safeguarding, and continued professional development for all staff in keeping students safe is a high priority. Safeguarding systems are effective across the provision.
- Parents and carers are pleased with the behaviour and progress of their children at the school. They greatly value the commitment of staff and the range of opportunities available.
- Staff are unanimous in being proud to work at the school. They believe it is well led and managed.
- The local authority support, since the last inspection, has been timely, appropriate and of good quality.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The management committee has been reviewed and restructured since the previous inspection and is a developing strength of the school. Its members set high standards for the school and for themselves as a group.
 - Governors receive regular information about the progress and achievement of students, the quality of teaching and behaviour and attendance. They feel the quality of information has improved, and that it has enabled them to evaluate the school's rate of improvement and provide increased challenge to the headteacher and senior staff. They are fully aware of how well the school is performing.
 - Governors visit the school regularly to keep up to date with aspects of its development and performance. They set challenging targets for the headteacher and they are involved in determining salary progression from the outcomes of performance management. Staff who do not meet requirements do not progress along the pay scale.

- The governing body ensures that the school meets statutory requirements for safeguarding.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good. In lessons students behave well, they concentrate and are focused on their work. They ask questions when given the opportunity and contribute to the good atmosphere for learning. Their behaviour is now having a positive impact on their progress and achievement in lessons.
- Students are almost always punctual to lessons and are ready to learn. Boys and girls present their work well and take pride in it. Very little work is unfinished.
- Students' conduct is good. They meet the standards of appearance expected of them. They respect displays of work around the building and value their learning environment; there is no litter. They sometimes lack confidence when meeting visitors but always make an effort to be polite and welcoming. They get on well together and respond in a mature manner to each other and adults during social time.
- Attendance is monitored very closely and is now good and improving as a result of the strenuous efforts of staff working with students and their families.
- Students understand the points rewards system for good behaviour and they can achieve points in all lessons and activities. They are confident that consequences are applied fairly. Students say that behaviour is good and that when there is disruption it is always dealt with quickly.
- The provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good; this is through lessons, outdoor activities, visits and in social time.

Safety

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Safeguarding procedures on the different sites are carefully followed. Risk assessments are clear, detailed and up to date.
- The school is acutely aware of the dangers inherent in the flow of electronic information between centres and with the alternative provision, and takes steps to ensure that it is protected and secure.
- Students say that they feel safe in school and parents and carers agree. They know how to keep themselves safe when using the internet and mobile phones. They have had lessons as part of the personal and social development course and talks from the local police officer.
- Students say that they get on well together but if any bullying does occur, including racist and homophobic bullying, it is dealt with by the adults. They are confident that there is always someone they can talk to if they need help.
- Students' behaviour and safety at the alternative provision are good and monitored with the same rigour as at the main centres.

The quality of teaching is good

- The quality of teaching is good. Teachers' lesson planning ensures that activities are interesting and enjoyable so that students are fully engaged in the lessons and achieve well.
- Teachers use practical activities and models effectively in order to make sure that students learn well. For example, in a mathematics lesson the teacher used a variety of containers and wooden blocks so that students could develop their understanding of volume.
- Longer-term sequences of lessons are carefully planned to maximise students' learning potential. For example, in a geography lesson at the alternative provision, students used a large-scale model of sand and water to investigate longshore drift. As a result, students deepened their knowledge of the process and were well prepared for their future field trip to the coast to study erosion.
- There are strong relationships between students and staff, so there is a very positive atmosphere for learning in classrooms.
- Teaching assistants are very effectively deployed and work successfully with students. They are careful not to do the work for the student and their interventions are astutely timed to enable students to learn better and build self-confidence.
- Teachers' questioning is good. This has been a strong focus of professional development and the impact on the quality of teaching is clear. For example, in an English lesson, the teacher was able to use a sequence of questions to find out about students' understanding of the features of persuasive writing. She

then used this information to finely tune the activity to improve their learning.

- Teachers use examples of finished work very well. Students are almost always clear about the quality of work they are aiming for.
- The teaching of literacy and mathematics is good. All teachers mark students' spelling, punctuation and grammar and make use of a range of opportunities to develop students' numeracy skills. Students sometimes struggle to focus on reading but greatly enjoy social reading activities and the reading scheme. Adults set a good example to students in terms of reading.
- Marking and assessment of students' work are good. Teachers give feedback, which is both encouraging and detailed, about what students need to do to improve.
- Teaching is not yet outstanding because expectations vary across subjects and are not always high enough to support rapid progress. Sometimes the pace of lessons is too rushed and so students are not able to develop deeper understanding.

The achievement of pupils

is good

- The achievement of students is good. The proportion of students achieving five or more GCSE passes rose sharply in 2014. Almost half of all students now achieve at least five A* to G GCSE passes and a quarter achieve more than this. This is as a result of good teaching.
- Students' progress in English is good and, in 2014, the proportion making expected progress from their starting points was in line with the national figures for mainstream schools. This is in spite of many students missing out on their education prior to attending the unit. The impact of teaching on students' achievement while at the unit is particularly strong, with nearly half of students making greater than expected progress in English.
- In 2014 achievement in mathematics was not as strong as in English but is improving rapidly. Just under half of students made expected progress and almost all of these students also made greater than expected progress.
- Information about students' progress in school shows that students' achievement in English and mathematics is continuing to improve.
- In 2014, disadvantaged students achieved better than other students, with half achieving five A* to G GCSE passes. In English, there were no significant gaps between the attainment of disadvantaged students and others, both nationally and within the school. In mathematics the gaps are closing rapidly.
- For students currently in the school, disadvantaged students make more progress in English than other students, both within the school and nationally. In mathematics these students make the same progress as other students.
- Observations of achievement in lessons and of students' work support the accuracy of these improved figures in English and mathematics.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs generally achieve in line with their peers. Students with a statement of special educational needs achieve very well.
- The achievement of the most able is improving as teaching is improving and the curriculum is adapted to suit their needs. For example, some students are able to study for the higher mathematics paper and students can also study English literature and history.
- Students' achievement at the alternative provision is good. Students achieve a wide variety of outdoor and sports qualifications, including the Duke of Edinburgh Award, canoeing and kayaking and climbing awards. Outdoor Academy very effectively contributes to students' achievement in GCSE geography and science.

The sixth form provision

is good

- The sixth form is good. Students achieve well because expectations of students are high as they move into the sixth form. An increasing number are achieving more and higher level qualifications such as the Duke of Edinburgh gold award. Where students are new to the unit, for example from being home educated, they make rapid progress. Retention rates are high and so students finish the courses they have chosen and achieve well. For students currently attending, nearly 90% are making at least good progress across their subjects.
- Teaching is good. Teachers develop a more probing questioning style with sixth form students and students are confident to respond positively. They are able to take more responsibility for their learning,

for example in the planning of a GCSE photography visit.

- Students behave well and feel safe in school. They say that they feel very well supported in their studies and that adults are approachable if there are any problems. Students' attendance and punctuality are good.
- Leadership and management are good. The headteacher's vision for the sixth form, and determination in pursuing funding and setting it up, have been of real benefit for students. They can study new qualifications or improve their grades in others so that they are much better prepared to apply for places at college or to go into employment. The school recognises that not all students will achieve their best in a large college environment and is still working to develop a distinct character for the sixth form so that students can improve their achievement even further.

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	131066
Local authority	West Berkshire
Inspection number	453448

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	14–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	50
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	11
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Chair	Rod King
Headteacher	Jacqueline Davies
Date of previous school inspection	7–8 February 2013
Telephone number	01635 48872
Email address	jdavies@alternative.w-berks.sch.uk

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