

ACE Schools Plymouth

Martins Gate, Bretonside, Plymouth, Devon PL4 0AT

Inspection dates

13–14 February 2019

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leaders are passionate that every pupil, whatever their previous education history, deserves another chance to succeed. As a result of their commitment to providing high-quality provision, pupils do well.
- Leaders have developed strong systems of management across sites. There are common expectations and systems of accountability. Individual sites are, therefore, well organised.
- Leaders work very hard to safeguard pupils. They are very aware of the many risks to their pupils. They have established good relationships with outside agencies. There is a very strong safeguarding culture throughout ACE.
- Teaching is of high quality on most sites. It is tailored precisely to individual needs and underpinned by very strong relationships between adults and pupils. This quality is not as consistent on the Bretonside site.
- Leaders offer a bespoke curriculum tailored to individual needs and aspirations. This means that pupils are much more likely to engage and succeed.
- Pupils' attendance improves considerably. Pupils learn to manage their emotions and behaviour. Pupils develop pride in their work.
- Pupils make good progress. They frequently gain a range of qualifications and leave ACE for a variety of appropriate destinations. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), including those with mental health needs, do well.
- Trustees have overseen the successful establishment of the multi-academy trust and a period of expansion. They identified themselves that governance required strengthening. They have taken appropriate action but there is still work to do to ensure that leaders are rigorously held accountable for all sites.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen teaching, particularly on the Bretonside site, to ensure that:
 - pupils' detailed assessment information is used to inform teaching
 - pupils' academic progress in lessons is captured and built upon in subsequent teaching
 - there are clear expectations about behaviour in and attendance at lessons and these are implemented consistently.
- Continue to strengthen governance and the support and challenge to leaders by:
 - establishing strong governance through cluster groups in different geographical areas
 - further clarifying the role of the cluster group
 - establishing mechanisms so that cluster representatives can check the work of sites.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Committed and passionate leaders and trustees are determined that every pupil will get the best chance at ACE, whatever their previous experience elsewhere. Leaders have successfully built a network of high-quality ACE provisions that offer tailored support to very vulnerable pupils. They are very successful at re-engaging pupils in education and supporting them in their next steps.
- Leaders' high expectations and strong management across the sites mean that there is consistency and good oversight. There is regular and robust monitoring, for example, of pupils' attendance, achievement and progress, as well as systems to ensure safeguarding. This means that leaders have a clear view of the quality of each site and can support them to improve provision further.
- Site and middle leaders make a significant contribution to the quality of provision. They have a detailed knowledge of their particular area, for example behavioural support or hospital and home provision. On a day-to-day basis, they ensure that pupils are well cared for and safe and that they receive high-quality teaching and learning that meet their needs.
- Leaders give very high priority to working with other agencies. They work effectively in partnership with commissioning local authorities, with psychiatrists and nurses on some sites and with youth workers on others. This means that pupils receive a joined-up service that is suitable to their needs.
- Across the different sites, the curriculum is tailored to the different needs of pupils. It is underpinned by developing key skills and knowledge, as well as being flexible so that pupils engage. This means that pupils leave with appropriate qualifications and personal qualities, and they are successful in their next destinations.
- Learning outside the classroom provides pupils with challenging, exciting and different experiences to help them learn and engage. Pupils practise skills, as well as learning to conform to expectations of behaviour in public and to represent the school.
- Leaders ensure that there is good-quality careers and transition advice available. They ensure that pupils can make informed choices through taster days and work experience. Few pupils are not in education or training when they leave ACE.
- A few pupils are taught through alternative providers. The curriculum for these pupils is tailored around their aspirations for the future, for example working with animals or art and design, and may include work experience. Leaders ensure that there is ongoing contact with providers to ensure that pupils attend, are safe and are making progress.
- Leaders ensure that pupils have opportunities to learn about other cultures and beliefs. Staff give a high profile to respecting and listening to pupils' voice, modelling expectations and expecting pupils to respond to these. Consequently, pupils are prepared effectively for life in modern Britain.
- The overwhelming majority of staff who completed the confidential staff questionnaire said they are proud to work for ACE. Leaders are very visible across sites and ensure that the staff's voice is heard. Staff have appropriate professional development

opportunities and are encouraged to develop their own ideas and solutions to improve the quality of provision for young people.

Governance of the school

- Trustees are ambitious for the work of ACE schools and committed to ensuring the best for their pupils. They recently recognised that, due to the small size of the group and the growing complexity of ACE schools, their governance in some key areas was not strong enough. They have rightly strengthened the membership of the trustee group. They are in the process of establishing regional clusters to monitor the work of different geographical areas more deeply. Two of the three areas are not yet established.
- Members of the Plymouth cluster take their role to monitor the work of the Plymouth sites seriously. They diligently scrutinise key performance indicators, data and information from leaders and ask challenging questions. It is still early days and there remains some confusion about the respective roles and responsibilities of trustees, cluster members and the executive. Strategies to systematically check and triangulate information from leaders are not yet developed.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders have implemented robust systems across all sites to ensure effective practice to keep pupils safe. This is underpinned by a culture where safeguarding is an important part of everyday life in the school and where staff know pupils well and are vigilant.
- Leaders are well trained. They attend local authority key groups, which means that they keep up to date with local and national developments. Staff receive regular training, including supervision, and are confident that they know how to act if they are worried.
- Pupils say they feel safe. Most staff who completed the staff questionnaire agree. Speaking informally with inspectors, one pupil said 'This is the only place I feel safe, other than my care home.' Another said, 'It is like home.'
- All the required checks to make sure that staff are suitable to work with pupils are undertaken rigorously and recorded appropriately. Staff ensure that sites remain safe and conduct, when necessary, appropriate searches of young people as they enter.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Adults adapt learning effectively to meet the needs of individual pupils. This may include practical activities or short sharp bursts of learning with opportunities to do other things. These approaches mean that pupils who previously found learning very challenging or negative experience success.
- The high staff-pupil ratio means that staff know pupils very well. Strong relationships mean that pupils are kept on task, given confidence and challenged to complete work.

Pupils shared with inspectors how well staff support them to extend their answers and achieve higher marks or provide activities which mean that they will be successful when they return to mainstream schools.

- Work stations for those with more complex needs are well set up, including weekly targets, visual timetables and points charts. These support learning through providing security and consistency.
- Specialist subject staff or lead teachers ensure that work delivered by teaching assistants is of high quality. There is effective modelling and coaching in place to develop the skills and knowledge of teaching assistants.
- Detailed baseline assessments and targets based on education, health and care (EHC) plans ensure that work is challenging and pitched at the right level for most pupils. Pupils build on their previous knowledge well or address the gaps. On some occasions, this rich information is not used sufficiently and work planned is too easy so that pupils are not challenged enough, particularly on the Bretonside site.
- Regular assessment and 'team around me' reviews ensure that pupils are making good progress over time. Interventions are put in place if a pupil is at risk of underachieving. On occasions, learning in lessons is not adequately captured by adults in pupils' records. Their evaluation focuses too much on a pupil's attitude or behaviour. This means that opportunities to build on learning between lessons are weakened.
- On some occasions, particularly on the Bretonside site, staff are not clear enough about expectations of pupils' behaviour or do not follow up issues sufficiently. Attendance at certain lessons is erratic. Disruption is not challenged effectively. This means that learning is compromised for a few individuals.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- ACE's 'STAR skills' tracking shows that pupils make good progress in the personal skills needed to be successful learners and adults. Pupils get better, for example, at communication, managing emotions, safety and risk awareness. Pupils approach their learning with growing confidence.
- Leaders ensure that the curriculum supports pupils' personal development well. Sessions include, for example, sex and relationships, cyber bullying and substance misuse. As a result, pupils are informed and can make better choices.
- Many pupils have complex mental health or behavioural difficulties. ACE provides the security and approaches so that pupils learn to manage these better. The high quality of education on offer is a key part of pupils' recovery and success in managing their emotions.
- Staff, in their day-to-day interactions, demonstrate that pupils are respected and valued. This clear and consistent message underpins ACE's approach and develops pupils' self-esteem and well-being. It encourages pupils to trust others and reflect on their own responses. Consequently, pupils have more positive interactions and learn to manage their behaviour better.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Leaders have been successful in improving attendance overall. They have successfully raised expectations, for example through making changes to the times of the school. They have strong policies and procedures in place, including working with education welfare officers and using the courts where necessary. Pupils now routinely have higher attendance on site.
- Pastoral leads rigorously monitor the attendance of individual pupils. They intervene quickly if there are concerns. Leaders use the different ACE provisions very flexibly to engage pupils. Some, for example, receive home support, while others are taught on different sites. These approaches mean that pupils who were persistently absent from previous schools attend ACE more.
- Strong behaviour management procedures are in place. These are based on a philosophy of consequences and choices and a belief that pupils are given the opportunity to make fresh starts. On most sites, the implementation of the procedures is appropriate and supports learning effectively. On the Bretonside site, it is less consistent.
- Staff are well trained to deal with challenging behaviour and how to physically intervene where necessary. Any serious incident is recorded and followed up effectively. Leaders examine any trends and make changes to ensure that pupils and staff are supported appropriately.
- Detailed tracking shows that pupils' behaviour and conduct improve over time.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Many pupils who attend ACE have experienced significant turbulence in their education. On arrival, they often have poor attitudes to learning and significant gaps in their knowledge and skills. Many have SEND. Once at ACE, they soon settle and engage with learning and make good progress.
- Pupils gain a range of qualifications. Most pupils leave with a qualification in English and mathematics at entry level or GCSE. Many achieve qualifications in other subjects, such as citizenship, humanities and science, as well as vocational subjects.
- Those pupils who attend Plym Bridge House as inpatients successfully continue their studies in a range of subjects. As disruption is minimised, pupils are successful when they return to their mainstream school.
- Pupils with SEND achieve the targets set for them in their EHC plans. Small steps, including in social skills, are captured and built upon.
- Pupils leave for a variety of destinations. Many pupils are successfully re-integrated back into mainstream education. A few are assessed as requiring specialist provision and are successfully transferred.
- Pupils leave at the end of Year 11 to go to a wide range of destinations based on their aspirations and qualifications. These might include apprenticeships and further

education. Pupils are successful in maintaining these placements.

- Work in books shows strong progress. Pupils, many of whom were initially very reluctant to engage, are developing key skills in English and mathematics. In the best examples seen, pupils build on their newly learned skills and use these in extended pieces of writing. Sometimes, work set for a few is too easy, which slows their learning.
- Pupils are encouraged to take pride in their work. On most sites, pupils' presentation and attention to their work are improving.

School details

Unique reference number	142835
Local authority	Plymouth
Inspection number	10080792

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

Type of school	All-through alternative provision
School category	Academy alternative provision converter
Age range of pupils	4 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	291
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Tim Searle
Acting headteacher	Ruth Westwood
Telephone number	01752 396 100
Website	www.aceschools.net
Email address	Ruth.Westwood@aceschools.net
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- ACE Schools Plymouth is an alternative provision academy with a range of alternative and specialist provisions. It became part of the ACE Schools Multi-Academy Trust in 2016. The predecessor pupil referral unit, Alternative Complementary Education, was judged to be good by Ofsted in November 2013.
- ACE Bretonside is the main secondary teaching base for pupils aged 11 to 16 who have been excluded from school or who are at risk of exclusion.
- ACE Ford is the primary teaching base. The pupils on this site have been excluded or are at risk of exclusion from mainstream schools.
- At ACE Seymour House, there is provision for young people who are affected by drugs and alcohol. ACE works with youth workers from the Hamoaze House charity team to provide an education based on youth work, talking therapy work and a thematic learning programme based on English and mathematics skills.
- ACE Dover Road is the main teaching base for secondary-aged pupils who are too ill to

attend mainstream school due to physical and mental ill-health.

- ACE provides education to all school-aged children who are inpatients on the wards at Derriford Hospital, Plymouth Hospitals NHS Trust.
- ACE provides the education element to all pupils who attend the Terraces Day Assessment Unit, which is a diagnostic unit run by Livewell Southwest for young people exhibiting complex neurodevelopmental psychological problems.
- ACE provides education in Plym Bridge House, a residential (tier 4) child and adolescent mental health service run by Livewell Southwest.
- ACE provides wrap-around services in Plymouth, three sites in Cornwall and a site in Exeter, Devon. These services provide education provision for pupils with complex SEND who have EHC plans. These pupils have not succeeded at their previous special or mainstream settings.
- ACE provides outreach tuition for pupils who require education at home. It also provides support for school-aged young and expectant mothers, their partners, families and new babies.
- ACE uses alternative education providers to extend the curricular offer for pupils. These include Bikespace, Tamar Skills, ASPIRE, NORPRO, Construction Training South West and Plymouth City College.
- Most pupils are White British. There are more boys than girls.
- The proportion of pupils for whom the school receives pupil premium funding is well above the national average.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited the Bretonside, Ford, Dover Road, Seymour House and Plym Bridge sites in Plymouth, the St Austell, Camborne and Launceston sites in Cornwall and the Exeter site. They were accompanied by senior leaders.
- Inspectors observed teaching and looked at pupils' work and at plans.
- Discussions took place with the acting headteacher, the chief executive officer of the ACE Schools Trust, other leaders from the trust and leaders at the various sites. Inspectors spoke with the chair of the board of trustees, two members of the Plymouth local cluster committee, a representative of Plymouth local authority and a selection of alternative providers.
- Inspectors examined a wide range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation and action plans, reports from outside agencies, trustee and governing body minutes and review, and the school's analysis of pupils' progress, behaviour, exclusions and attendance.
- Inspectors spoke with pupils informally about their work, met with groups of pupils and listened to their views about the school.
- Inspectors took account of the 135 responses to the staff survey, the four responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and four free-text responses, as well as three emails from parents and carers.

Inspection team

Stephen McShane, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Sue Ivermee	Ofsted Inspector
Gill Hickling	Ofsted Inspector

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