

Inspection of an outstanding school: The St Aubyn Centre Education Department

St Aubyn Centre, 2 Boxted Road, Colchester, Essex CO4 5HG

Inspection dates:

31 October and 1 November 2023

Outcome

The St Aubyn Centre Education Department continues to be an outstanding school.

What is it like to attend this school?

St Aubyn Centre Education Department is a sanctuary for pupils who are experiencing difficult times. Staff work effectively to break down the barriers to learning that pupils face in their daily lives. Adults carefully craft learning experiences around what works best for individual pupils. Staff take great care and attention to understand pupils' significant needs and backgrounds.

Pupils learn well in a calm haven. Staff ensure pupils can do their best. Warm relationships between pupils and staff help pupils to maintain positive attitudes to their learning. Pupils' mental health and well-being is a key priority for the well-trained staff. If things get hard, staff are there for pupils. They support them to be hopeful and aspire for a better future for themselves. This includes high-quality careers advice and mentoring. This prepares pupils very well for their next steps when they are ready to take them.

Many aspects of the school's curriculum help to build pupils' resilience and confidence. Pupils successfully re-engage with education. They achieve qualifications that set them up for future success. Wider experiences, such as visiting speakers and authors and many trips outside of the school, broaden and enrich pupils' lives.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

The school's curriculum is exceptional. It enables pupils to make great strides in their learning. This is despite pupils' lives being disrupted by often complex and challenging circumstances. The curriculum is ambitious. It consists of a broad range of academic subjects. The curriculum is designed to improve pupils' progress in areas such as their relationships, their engagement with learning and their hopes for the future.

The school works closely with pupils and their families when pupils first arrive in the provision. Many pupils are only in the setting for short periods. High-quality checks on pupils' prior learning enable the school to carefully sequence future learning. Pupils then build their understanding over time, from their various starting points.

Highly trained and expert staff know pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities exceptionally well. There are high-quality 'individual education plans' in place. Regular information is shared between the school, families and the St Aubyn Centre. This information includes how well pupils are doing with their learning or if pupils are finding their lives more challenging than normal. Staff skilfully adjust and adapt their lessons to enable pupils to be successful with their studies. Staff take learning to pupils on the ward and make the most of every available moment when pupils are able and ready to learn. The learning activities staff choose enable pupils to practise their learning and grow in confidence. Despite the complex barriers and adversity that pupils face, many are successful here.

Highly effective checks spot if pupils need support with reading and literacy knowledge. Effective support means that pupils catch up with their reading quickly. The curriculum allows pupils to engage with a range of fiction and non-fiction texts. Books are shared widely and often with pupils. This is helping pupils to develop a love of reading.

The school maintains strong relationships with the medical team and other professionals. This enables school staff to access high-quality training to deal with pupils' complex behaviours and needs. Consequently, staff know the best ways to support pupils to engage in learning. Staff treat pupils kindly and with the utmost respect. Staff have very high expectations for what pupils can achieve. Pupils often achieve these. Pupils' attitudes and behaviours toward the education team are exemplary.

The school's curriculum contains topics and subjects that are highly appropriate for pupils with complex needs. Areas such as relationships education are sensitively adjusted to pupils' prior experiences. Well-being and emotional support therapies linked to the St Aubyn Centre complement the curriculum. This work helps to raise pupils' aspirations and their aims for a more positive, hopeful future. Many pupils make successful transitions back to their original settings or to new destinations.

The management committee knows the school very well. The committee members expertly ensure that leaders continue to review and improve the educational offer. The school does not sit on its laurels. It works closely with, and shares practice with, a range of other providers. High-quality training means staff well-being is very well considered. Communication between staff and other professionals is strong. This ensures pupils' learning and well-being remain at the heart of the school's work.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Background

When we have judged a school to be outstanding, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains outstanding. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be outstanding in November 2014.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	134260
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10269253
Type of school	Pupil referral unit
School category	Pupil referral unit
Age range of pupils	13 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	15
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	4
Appropriate authority	Local authority
Headteacher	Simon Turnnidge (Executive headteacher)
Website	www.staubyn-centre.essex.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	16 May 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The executive headteacher oversees this school and another similar provision located at Rochford Hospital in the same local authority.
- Pupils are dual registered with their home schools or colleges.
- The school does not use alternative provision.
- The school caters for pupils with complex emotional and mental health needs. A small minority have education, health and care (EHC) plans.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Due to the nature of the specialist curriculum, inspectors carried out deep dives in the following areas: English, mathematics, science, and personal, social, health and

economic education. In each area, inspectors met with leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers and pupils and looked at evidence of pupils' work.

- The lead inspector reviewed the school's behaviour systems, attendance information and records of behaviour incidents.
- The lead inspector reviewed case studies of pupils. As part of this, he scrutinised information shared from partner schools, core meeting information, EHC plans and 'individual education plans' for several pupils.
- The lead inspector met with medical professionals who work in partnership with the school. He observed a case review meeting where professionals discuss, with a pupil, their progress.
- Inspectors spoke with pupils in class, in unstructured time and individually about their experiences in this setting.
- The lead inspector held a meeting with members of the management committee and held a telephone call with a representative from the local authority.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- The lead inspector also reviewed how important pupil information is shared between the school and the St Aubyn Centre.
- The lead inspector considered responses to Ofsted Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire. He also spoke to parents in person.
- The lead inspector considered seven responses to Ofsted's survey of staff.

Inspection team

Damian Loneragan, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Kathryn Herlock

Ofsted Inspector

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