

Avenue Centre for Education

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	134525
Local Authority	Luton
Inspection number	328919
Inspection dates	12 March 2009
Reporting inspector	George Derby

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 under pilot arrangements; it was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Pupil referral unit
School category	Pupil referral unit
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	32
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Chair	Mr Graham Ryan
Headteacher	Mr Chris Day
Date of previous school inspection	27–28 June 2006
School address	Tomlinson Avenue Luton LU4 0QP
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Introduction

This pilot inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector. Eight lessons were visited and meetings were held with a member of the management committee, staff and students. The centre's work was observed and a range of evidence looked at including its analysis of assessments about students' response to learning and their progress, documentation about policies and procedures and the questionnaires completed by 14 parents.

Many aspects of the centre's work were reviewed. The inspection looked in detail at the following:

- the centre's judgements about attainment and progress in the different areas of learning and the measures it uses to judge students' progress
- how students' individual needs are addressed through target setting
- the long-term impact of the centre's work on students' life chances
- how the centre judges the effectiveness of its outreach provision.

Information about the school

This is a pupil referral unit (PRU) for Key Stage 3 students at risk of exclusion or who have been permanently excluded. Most students are admitted on a part time basis with different students attending on different days. Currently, five attend full time. The average length of stay is just over a term and a half, but can be longer in some instances. This means that the turnover of students is very high. There are a few students from ethnic groups but most students are of White British origin and nearly all students are boys, at present. A very small number of students have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Most enter the centre with skills, knowledge and understanding at a low level because of underachievement due to their disaffection and lack of attendance at school. The centre supports mainstream secondary schools and students in the local area through its outreach service. Currently, this amounts to 21 students in 10 schools.

Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness

1

Capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

Avenue Centre for Education (ACE) is an 'oasis' of great success which is highly praised by students and parents alike. This is an outstanding PRU which transforms its students considerably. It opens their minds to learning and gets them back on the right track in their educational life. This is because the headteacher and staff want the best for their students and work tirelessly to make this the provision that it is – simply exceptional! They very closely check on every aspect of their work and use this highly accurate information to make the centre a better place. This constant tenacity, striving for excellence, has resulted in the centre going from strength to strength since its last inspection. The centre's track record of success is overwhelming and it is exceptionally well placed to improve further.

The outcomes for students are also exceptional. They make significant strides in their learning, personal skills and development. They display, for example, excellent behaviour, extremely positive attitudes to learning and school, and outstanding relationships with one another. At the heart of all this is excellent teaching, support, guidance and care, and especially the centre's excellent assessment of students' needs and abilities and of the progress they make towards their targets. However, the centre misses the opportunity to detail their National Curriculum levels, which would provide secondary schools with even greater information on transfer as well as the students themselves. The centre's assessments often find that some students have additional needs, not known about previously. These students, too, make excellent progress because the centre addresses their needs so well.

Students who have experienced educational failure in the past hold their heads up high, because the centre is extremely successful in helping them believe in themselves and gives them the confidence to believe in, and trust, the adults around them. As a result, their self-esteem goes through the roof and they learn very effectively how to work with others and how to learn. The remainder go on to alternative provision and none drop out of education. All this is a great achievement because this success is sustained in the long term. Links with parents are excellent and parents are effusive in their praise. Students now enjoy their education thoroughly and see this as a result of the centre's excellent provision. They say that this is due to the individual attention they get, the great respect from adults, but most mention the very calm environment and how everyone works hard to help them. They are right!

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that the information gained from the assessments made about students' learning are linked to National Curriculum levels to help students' and secondary schools' awareness of their academic performance.

How good is the overall outcome for individuals and groups of pupils?

1

A very high percentage of students return to mainstream school and stay there successfully over the remainder of their time in secondary education. The centre achieves its key aim particularly well in this respect and their 'turn-round time' is mostly rapid. Students leave ACE armed with strategies to help them maintain themselves in school and with extremely positive attitudes about learning and enjoyment of education. This is a major transformation from when they entered, having been excluded because of their negative and often violent behaviour. From low levels of performance they reach broadly average standards because the cloud of underachievement is removed and they realise they can succeed. In lessons seen, their learning was at least good and sometimes excellent; over time their progress is outstanding.

The centre's success is also due to the focus on the individual and the trusting relationships which are formed between the students and staff. The progress towards the challenging learning goals set for them and also their personal targets is exceptionally good. Students are highly aware of the centre's systems and high expectations and are exceptionally motivated to meet their targets and gain rewards.

The centre also provides them with the ability to think and reflect about their actions and so students become intrinsically motivated to 'get back on track'. As a result, their spiritual, moral and social development are excellent. A predominant area of weakness for many students is often in the area of literacy. Because of excellent English teaching and outstanding literacy support students rapidly develop skills. In addition, the high quality of the assessment of students' needs and the support they receive leads to additional difficulties being spotted immediately and no students get left behind educationally. This means that those with learning difficulties make equally excellent progress as their peers.

The school clearly has students' health and well-being in its sights and students gain an excellent understanding about healthy lifestyles and how to keep themselves safe while at the centre. They become quickly aware of the risks around them and how to manage risk. One of the most significant changes is in students' behaviour, which is outstanding. Their attendance improves enormously and it rises rapidly to broadly average. There is a heavy emphasis on students solving problems, personal organisation and budgeting and on developing basic skills so they can compete on a level playing field with their peers in mainstream schools. Students very quickly adopt techniques which help them become independent learners. Although all these are particularly outstanding features, because attendance is only average, the skills

that contribute to students' economic well-being are judged as good overall, rather than outstanding.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	1
The quality of learning for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their progress	1
How well do pupils achieve and enjoy their learning?	2
To what extent do pupils feel safe?	1
How well do pupils behave?	1
To what extent do pupils adopt healthy lifestyles?	1
To what extent do pupils contribute to the school and wider community?	1
Pupils' attendance	3
How well do pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being?	2
What is the extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development?	1

The quality of the school's work

Students learn exceptionally effectively and make excellent progress because the teaching is so well focused on their individual needs. It lifts their spirits so well that they learn that they are of worth and can achieve. As a result, they become highly motivated in pursuit of excellence, working towards re-integration into school. The targets set for their learning in the subjects and activities and for their personal needs, often in relation to behaviour, attitudes and relationships, are monitored particularly closely. Students are absolutely clear about what is required of them and of the rewards they can receive. They view the incentive scheme as very powerful and also know what they can expect if they do not meet the centre's very high expectations of them. As one student said, 'there are always consequences to everything in life'. Through their excellent relationships with staff and students' desire to do their very best, they work highly productively and respond to the great challenges presented. Staff are very clear about the best ways in which students learn and provide activities which give confidence but make great demands of students to think. Questioning is excellent; it is probing, challenging and students respond to this by working extremely hard, concentrating very well and thinking intensely about their answers. All this works together to deepen their understanding considerably.

The extensive range of activities provided in the centre also meets the students' needs exceptionally well. There are high quality programmes in literacy, numeracy, information and communication technology, physical education and personal, social, health and citizenship education. The curriculum is also designed to challenge students, face them with problems to solve and prepare them for future placement in

¹ Grades for attainment are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; 4 is low

local schools. Coupled with the highly motivational reward systems and the much-valued, award-bearing 'U Choose' programme, the excellent support provided helps students to be self-motivated, moving away from dependency to self-sufficiency in learning, and to taking personal responsibility.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

High quality teaching and purposeful learning	1
Effective assessment	1
An appropriate curriculum which meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, provision through partnership with other organisations	1
Support, guidance and care	1

How effective are leadership and management?

An excellent vision for the future by the headteacher, and leadership at all levels which focuses on the individual student as well high quality in the centre, has led to outstanding improvement. There is no complacency; just a commitment by all to be the best and an absolutely resolute and common understanding of the centre's goals and purpose.

The centre knows it is doing exceptionally well because of the very regular and extensive checks it makes on students' views and its partners' responses. These 'health checks' lead to the centre knowing precisely what works and how things can be done better for students, using the wide ranging information received. For instance, it knows that local schools want more outreach support because they see it as highly successful. The centre never stands still, knows it can always do better and has a tenacious pursuit of excellence. It does not see itself in isolation but part of a continuum of provision. In this way, it regularly shares information from the evaluation of its success and also learns from others in the area and nationally.

The headteacher has set out a number of very well considered indicators to measure the centre's performance. These help the local authority and management committee know exactly how well the centre is doing and show that it is performing excellently. Committee members are supportive and have a great deal of expertise. They are clearly developing the capability to find information out for themselves and to challenge, to raise quality and standards even further.

Care of the individual is paramount and the centre's safeguarding procedures are excellent. At the heart of all its work, the centre works very hard to ensure that its students are regarded by schools as individuals who can manage their behaviour and learning and who are worthy of a place. The centre does this aspect of the promotion of equality and the tackling discrimination exceptionally well. Although it has adopted the local authority policy on this area of work, it has not yet made its strategy explicit in its own plan. Highly detailed assessment of each student and exceptional support for students in the centre and through the excellent outreach programme in mainstream schools results in the centre's pivotal role in binding the centre and local school community together. This also extends nationally through the

centre's partner links. The centre's plan for evaluating community cohesion is developing and this is why this aspect is good rather than outstanding.

These are the grades for leadership and management

Communicating ambition and driving improvement	1
Promoting equality of opportunity and tackling discrimination	2
Ensuring that safeguarding procedures are effective	1
Ensuring that the governing body provides effective challenge and support so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities are met	3
Promoting the school's relationship with parents and carers, including their involvement in decision-making about matters relating to learning and well-being	1
Developing partnerships with other providers, organisations and services	1
Ensuring the school contributes to community cohesion	2
Deploying resources to achieve value for money	1

Views of parents and carers

Parents are extremely positive about the centre and what it has done for their children. This inspection bears out their views. Just under half of the parents of students attending ACE replied to the inspection questionnaire, which is a good response. Parents talk very positively about the changes made in their children's attitudes and their importance for future education. One stated that, 'ACE has been brilliant for my son and I cannot thank them (the staff) enough... he has made good progress,' and another said 'ACE has done some excellent work with my son'.

They are also really thankful that the centre has identified the barriers that have prevented past learning and, for some, learning difficulties which have gone unrecognised.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. In 2007-8, 15% of schools were judged to be outstanding.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well. In 2007-8, 49% of schools were judged good.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils. In 2007-8, 32% of schools were judged satisfactory.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves. In 2007-8, 5% of schools were judged inadequate.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Achievement:	an overall measure of the pupils' success in their academic learning. The term combines attainment and progress. Pupils might make good progress, for example, but if their attainment remains low, inspectors may judge that their achievement is only satisfactory.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.



13 March 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Avenue Centre for Education, Luton, LU4 0QP

Your centre is excellent! Mr Day and the staff know precisely the right things that help you improve and all work extremely hard to make ACE the place it is. The centre has gone from strength to strength since it was last inspected and it is heading for even greater things.

Thank you for spending the time to talk with me and for telling me about your hopes for the future. You are a credit to ACE. I was very impressed by your motivation and the way you valued the high levels of respect staff have for you, the individual attention you get and the way you all get on, supporting and looking out for one another. The centre has clearly transformed you. From the dark days of being excluded from your secondary schools, you have gained much in understanding your own strengths and what you need to do to improve.

A clear strength of ACE is that the staff help you to believe in yourselves and that you can achieve. They help you face your fears but also show you that you can learn and make progress. By providing new challenges both physically, practically and intellectually, and especially through the 'U Choose' programme, you learn to tackle new and different things. Through the very careful guidance by staff, you learn to succeed. Well done! As a result, your attendance improves considerably, behaviour is excellent and your attitudes about yourself, others and work are extremely positive. You make excellent progress and learn well because the centre's teaching is excellent, you are supported extremely closely and the programme of activities is so expertly matched to your needs.

To help make the centre even better I have asked Mr Day to improve further the centre's excellent assessment of your work. In addition to the information the staff write about how well you make progress towards your challenging targets, I have asked them to record the National Curriculum levels you are working at. This will help you as well as staff at your new school to be clear about your attainment. It should also enable them to provide work at the right level of work for you from the very day you arrive.

Good luck for the future

George Derby
Lead inspector

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