

Avenue Centre for Education

Cutenhoe Road, Luton, Bedfordshire LU1 3NJ

Inspection dates

4–5 July 2017

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	Outstanding

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The experienced and effective headteacher has merged two pupil referral units into one and developed it further into a 'hub' for wider support services for other schools in Luton.
- He and his team of senior leaders play a strategic role in ensuring that pupils who are permanently excluded are placed in suitable provision to help them reengage in learning.
- Most pupils in key stage 3 attending the school's short-stay provision, the 'revolving door', make good progress and return to mainstream schools.
- Pupils in 'extended provision' in key stage 4 gain a range of GCSE and vocational qualifications. Over the last three years, all Year 11 pupils have progressed onto placements at local colleges or other providers.
- Excellent relations between pupils and staff, and small classes enable pupils to make good progress. They benefit greatly from one-to-one teaching and support in lessons.
- Pupils' books show that not all staff expect pupils to present their work neatly, or complete all tasks.
- Not all teachers apply the school's marking policy consistently. Spelling and grammatical errors are not always corrected.
- The school is inclusive and friendly. Pupils value the care and support provided and welcome the 'second chance' the school gives them.
- Behaviour is well managed. Staff get to know the personal backgrounds of every pupil. They work with them, and their parents and carers, to ensure that their needs are fully met.
- Leaders can point to significant gains made in reducing persistent absence, but overall, attendance remains below average.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good.
- The management committee oversees the school's development effectively. Not enough use is made of the five headteachers on the committee to validate leaders' views of the school.
- Parents and carers really appreciate what the school does for pupils.
- All safeguarding arrangements are fully met.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Gain greater consistency in the quality and quantity of pupils' work in their books by:
 - implementing common, agreed approaches to help them to present their work neatly
 - insisting that pupils complete all tasks
 - ensuring that all staff apply the school's procedures for marking pupils' work, including correcting basic errors in pupils' spelling and use of grammar, and providing them with time to improve their work.
- Raise overall attendance by maintaining and extending the range of actions used to monitor and intervene when pupils are regularly absent from school.
- Make more use of the expertise in the school's management committee to validate leaders' views of the school's work.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher has a clear vision and strategic overview of how integrated services support pupils who have been permanently excluded from schools within Luton and from neighbouring authorities. This is based on good partnerships with school leaders and regular involvement in the local authority's revised strategy for managing pupils with challenging behaviour. He also plays a lead role on the local pupil placement panel, which coordinates the most suitable provision for pupils who, for a range of reasons, have disengaged from learning, or are children looked after.
- He has steered the school through significant changes in recent years. He has the full support of his staff, who are proud to work for him. One member of staff said, 'The head is a kind, compassionate leader who cares deeply about his staff and pupils. Over the years he has led us to build a strong, confident and bonded community. He brings out the strengths of all of his staff, which is why we function so well as a team.'
- The headteacher knows where most of the school's strengths and weaknesses lie. He recognises the strengths and limitations of his staff and has taken swift action to add further capacity. Due to the school's small size there are very few middle leaders, in particular subject leaders, to provide specialist support and training for staff. Arrangements to manage the performance of staff are firmly in place but some personal targets need amending to ensure that all of them contribute fully to the school's improvement.
- A good curriculum matched to the different needs of pupils underpins much of the school's work. Pupils enjoy a broad choice of subjects, and a wide range of enrichment activities. The 'revolving door' in key stage 3 enables pupils to return to mainstream school after their short stay at the school. The large majority of pupils rejoin their school, or are allocated to another mainstream school to give them a fresh start. It also supports pupils at risk of permanent exclusion from their own schools who attend on a part-time basis and receive help to modify their poor behaviour.
- In key stage 4, pupils follow a blend of off-site learning, work experience and placements in other educational settings. Careers events and advice ensure that all pupils leave Year 11 with a placement in a local college or other provider. The success of the school's 'Zoo Academy' in partnership with Whipsnade Zoo noted at the time of the last inspection has been maintained and small groups of pupils continue to graduate having gained vital skills needed for the workplace. Leaders effectively use a proportion of the additional pupil premium funding to provide this resource.
- A wide range of enrichment activities provided for pupils, based on their needs and interests, promotes their personal development well. For example, model-making is used as a therapy to calm pupils' behaviour and develop positive relations. Pupils engage in Young Enterprise activities such as bicycle maintenance and lead projects to encourage younger pupils to drink more water.
- Merging the two units into one and reorganising the wider services provided for schools in Luton has absorbed much of the headteacher's time. This has reduced the time available for him to monitor and evaluate the school's work, in particular the quality of

teaching and its impact on learning. The school was found to be outstanding at its last inspection. This is no longer the case. It remains good, but more needs to be done to promote consistent, highly-quality teaching and to raise attendance further.

- An experienced senior leader has joined the leadership team to lead and manage the school's wider services. This and the recent addition of another senior leader have increased the school's capacity to make further improvements.

Governance of the school

- Members of the school's management committee, including headteachers and local authority personnel bring a wealth of knowledge and experience to the school. They oversee its day-to-day running and help to secure its strategic role in the local area.
- Members of the committee acknowledge the work done by the headteacher to foster stronger working relations with schools and alternative providers, which is ensuring that the school is able to meet the wider needs of schools.
- The committee monitors all aspects of the school's provision. This includes the preventative work done with pupils in mainstream schools to avoid exclusion, coordinating managed moves and aiding pupils' transition between primary and secondary school. Their role in monitoring the quality of the school's teaching and learning is underused. Leaders have not called upon their expertise to gauge the strengths and weaknesses in teaching and identify what needs to be done to maintain the school's effectiveness.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The management committee ensures that safeguarding policies and procedures are kept up to date.
- Records show that all required checks are carried out when recruiting new staff to work with children. All staff receive regular required training, including the 'Prevent' duty.
- Child protection matters are recorded and followed up robustly. Links with other agencies, particularly social services and the police, are firmly established.
- Excellent displays around school raise pupils' awareness of leading healthy lifestyles, including sex and relations, and keeping themselves safe online and in their local community. For example, during the inspection a guest speaker warned pupils of the dangers of knife crime and how to avoid harmful situations.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching is firmly based on forging good working relations with pupils. Staff are adept at engaging with pupils, rebuilding their confidence and encouraging them back into learning. Pupils' books and examples of projects they have engaged in confirm that most of them quickly reengage and begin to make accelerated progress.
- Initial assessments of pupils when they join the school provide staff with a range of information about their prior learning which they use to personalise plans for each

lesson. This includes updates of strategies that help pupils to learn effectively, and approaches that may trigger pupils to lose attention and interest. Staff get to know pupils well and identify what they can already do, and where they need further support. Teaching in small groups, often on a one-to-one basis, provides pupils with intensive support, matched to meet their needs.

- All staff manage behaviour in lessons effectively. They demonstrate endless patience and tolerance when dealing with challenging behaviour. They set clear expectations of pupils, and challenge any off task or unacceptable behaviour. One-to-one teaching is particularly effective because it prevents pupils from disengaging and enables staff to review progress at regular intervals.
- Teachers use their good subject knowledge to plan activities that stimulate pupils' interest, such as soldering in design technology and using lenses in science to understand the refraction of light. Fewer hands-on resources such as number lines and counting equipment were evident in mathematics to help pupils calculate.
- Pupils' books in a range of other subjects confirm that they make accelerated progress. However, they also show a lack of pride in their work. Expectations of pupils are not always high enough. There are no consistent approaches to show them how to present their work neatly. Poor handwriting, often in pencil, and underlining without a ruler are left unchallenged in teacher's marking. At times, common errors such as incorrect spellings and not using capital letters, commas and full stops are also left unchallenged. Some written tasks are left unfinished.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Brief tutorials each morning set the tone for learning. Staff welcome pupils into school and promptly engage them in discussion about topical issues. All staff are well trained in observing pupils' demeanour to spot any concerns about their welfare or attitudes.
- Pupils are very positive about the impact the school has on their lives. One Year 11 pupil told inspectors, 'ACE gives you a better chance, because classes are smaller. I've had a good experience, and I'm now progressing onto college in September.' Three Year 10 girls who met with inspectors praised the care and support provided for them, agreeing that, 'It's much better than our previous school, here staff help you to sort out your problems at home, they give you time-out to calm down and there's always someone to talk to, and listen to you.'
- Three parents and carers responded by free text during the inspection. All praised the school's work. One response summed up the impact the school has on pupils by saying, 'Since joining in Year 11 my daughter's self-esteem and confidence have really grown. I have been so impressed with the one-to-one support she has received, which is just what she needed. My daughter is like a different child and I know this has a lot to do with short space of time she has spent at the Avenue Centre.'
- Attendance is below average. However, leaders can demonstrate the significant success they have had in getting pupils back into school who have either missed long

periods of schooling in the past due to persistent absence and exclusion, or never attended school. A range of effective actions have been developed to intervene early if pupils are regularly absent. These procedures need extending further to raise attendance towards the national average. Very low numbers of pupils prevent any meaningful comparisons between the attendance of different groups of pupils

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Most pupils join the school because they have been excluded from school or are at risk of exclusion due to their poor behaviour. Leaders can point to good examples of how they have helped pupils to modify their very challenging behaviour and reintegrate them back into learning.
- Pupils told inspectors that school is a safe, friendly place to be. Inspectors found pupils to be well behaved and respectful throughout the inspection. School records show that very few incidents of bullying occur. Very few pupils are excluded from school.
- Pupils understand the sanctions and rewards for improving their behaviour. Warning cards of yellow and red are issued, depending on the nature of the behaviour. Merits are awarded for good behaviour, linked to financial reward. Good displays around school remind pupils of how much money they accrue for good behaviour.
- Leaders provide an inclusive, caring environment in which pupils feel safe and are able to re-engage in learning. Cultural diversity is celebrated through food and cooking classes, types of music and school visitors. Weekly lessons in personal social and health education, including citizenship, and religious education enable pupils to discuss topical issues including fundamental British values, and foster a good understanding of the different cultures and beliefs of others.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Leaders rightly use a wide range of indicators to measure the overall impact they have on improving outcomes for pupils. This includes their personal development and welfare, as well as their academic performance.
- Improving pupils' 'readiness to learn' is prioritised. Staff recognise that establishing positive attitudes and behaviour is essential before learning can take place. Pupils in key stage 3 carry passports with daily skill targets such as building positive relations with others, using appropriate language and showing respect for staff. Broader targets chosen by pupils, such as 'to engage with my support' or 'to improve my attendance' help them to develop positive attitudes to school.
- Reintegration back into mainstream education is consistently high. For example, in 2016, over 90% of pupils in key stage 3 returned to their own or other secondary schools. Leaders' monitoring shows that 88% of these pupils have maintained their place in school.
- Assessment information shows that most pupils in key stage 3 make good progress. They make better progress in English than in other core subjects. This is because learning is well matched to pupils' prior learning. Suitable texts are chosen to stimulate

pupils' interest. Lots of praise and advice helps to encourage them to practise their reading aloud to build their confidence. Books show good examples of extended writing, including letter-writing and diary entries.

- Pupils attending the school's extended provision remain with the school throughout key stage 4. They make good progress and achieve vital qualifications by the end of Year 11 needed for the next stage of their lives. Last year, all pupils attained a basic award in literacy. Almost all of them attained a level 2 functional skills award in literacy. Similarly in numeracy, almost all pupils attained a level 2 functional skills award. Every pupil attained at least one GCSE qualification. All pupils attained GCSE personal, social and health education. Those capable of attaining higher GCSE grades did so. Very low numbers of pupils prevent any meaningful comparisons between the overall achievements of different groups of pupils.
- Staff ensure that pupils are placed in suitable alternative provision to enable them to gain other vocational qualifications, including a range of nationally recognised awards in music technology, cooking, sports leadership, lifesaving, motor maintenance and mechanics.
- Over the past three years, all Year 11 pupils have progressed onto post-16 learning at local colleges or other providers. Staff go out of their way to prepare pupils for the next stage by re-engaging them back into learning and by providing them with good careers education from a specialist adviser. Pupils are supported with their applications, and are accompanied to interviews. Staff monitor the welfare of these pupils over the following 12 months to ensure that they remain in education and training.

School details

Unique reference number	134525
Local authority	Luton
Inspection number	10031646

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection 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 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	24 (and 33 dual registered)
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Chair	Craig Smith
Headteacher	Chris Day
Telephone number	01582 748800
Website	www.avenuecentre.co.uk
Email address	acehead@lbc.luton.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	5–6 June 2014

Information about this school

- The school does not meet requirements on the publication of information about the business and financial interests of members of the management committee, or their roles in other schools.
- The school provides for pupils who have been permanently excluded or are at risk of permanent exclusion. All of them have special educational needs and/or disabilities, mostly behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. One pupil has an education, health and care plan.
- Approximately half of them are eligible for the pupil premium. The school does not receive all of its allocation of this funding from schools that pupils have been excluded from.
- The school is not allocated Year 7 catch-up funding.

- Most pupils are white British. A small proportion are from minority ethnic backgrounds.
- Pupils join at times other than at the start of the school year. Those attending the school's short-stay provision in key stage 3 known as the 'revolving door' do so on a full-time or a part-time basis. Pupils in key stage 4 attend the school's extended provision. This includes learning in school, and at a range of 24 other local providers in Luton. This is coordinated by the local authority's Alternative Learning and Progression Service (ALPS) based on the school site.
- The school provides a range of wider support services for pupils and their local schools, including mentoring, outreach support, counselling, group workshops and family support.
- The government's floor targets (the minimum targets that schools are expected to achieve in 2016) do not apply to this school.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 13 lessons. They attended morning tutorials to observe how pupils settle into school. They carried out learning walks to observe pupils' behaviour and to gauge the quality of their spiritual, moral, social and cultural education.
- They held meetings with senior and middle leaders, a member of the management committee who is also a local authority officer, and a group of pupils. The lead inspector held a telephone conversation with the headteacher of a local secondary school who is also a member of the management committee.
- Inspectors observed the school's work. They looked at safeguarding and child protection policy and procedures, risk assessments, self-evaluation and improvement planning, minutes of management committee meetings, records of pupils' behaviour and attendance, and other information provided by school leaders.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and three free texts sent by parents and carers, and 27 responses to Ofsted's questionnaire for staff. No questionnaire responses were received from pupils.

Inspection team

John Mitcheson, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Paul Copping

Ofsted Inspector

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