

The Attic

The Attic Learning Centre, Lovewell Road, Lowestoft, Suffolk NR33 0RQ

Inspection dates

21–22 September 2016

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	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Senior leaders are determined to provide every pupil with the best chance to develop the skills they need to be successful in adult life.
- Staff morale is high. Staff are very positive and share the senior leaders' vision to provide every pupil with the best possible opportunities at The Attic.
- Rigorous assessment before starting school ensures that teachers have detailed knowledge of pupils' academic ability and interests. Teachers use this well to provide interesting learning activities.
- Teachers and teaching assistants work well together to support pupils' learning.
- Progress in English and science is particularly strong.
- Staff manage pupils' behaviour well. They skilfully intervene to prevent incidents so that lessons progress without disruption.
- Pupils socialise well together. Relationships between staff and pupils are very positive.
- Keeping pupils safe is a high priority for all staff. Pupils agree that they are safe and well cared for in school.
- The work of the school to support pupils' personal development and welfare is exemplary. Pupils thrive in this nurturing environment and their self-confidence develops.
- Most pupils arrive with a history of very poor attendance. Staff work tirelessly to improve attendance, bringing about improved attendance for a large majority of pupils.
- The overwhelming majority of Year 11 pupils in 2015/16 progressed on to education, employment or training.
- In a small number of lessons teachers do not move pupils on to the next activity quickly enough. Progress is slower in these lessons.
- Progress in mathematics is not as rapid as it is in English because work is sometimes too easy and pupils do not have enough opportunity to solve mathematical problems or use their mathematics skills in other subjects.
- The school needs to continue to develop the range of GCSE courses offered.
- Very few pupils read outside their English lesson.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise the attainment of pupils from good to outstanding by:
 - providing a wider range of GCSE subjects
 - teachers moving pupils on to the next learning activity as soon as they are ready
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to read a wider range of materials.
- Build upon the improvements in mathematics teaching by providing pupils with:
 - harder work
 - more opportunities to solve mathematical problems in lessons
 - opportunities to use their mathematical skills in other subjects.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The executive headteacher is very well supported by her senior management team. They are all committed to providing the best opportunities for the pupils who join the school. Leaders have reviewed the work of the school, resulting in improvements in the quality of teaching, learning, behaviour and pupil outcomes.
- Staff are enthusiastic, enjoy working in the school and are committed to delivering the high expectations set by senior leaders. It is the thread that runs through the school and is central to the improvements since the last inspection.
- A systematic approach to monitoring teaching, learning and assessment enables leaders to identify best practice and where extra support is required. Support is provided through a programme of training.
- Performance management has been successful in improving teaching and learning as leaders have taken appropriate action to address weak teaching. Well-qualified teachers have been recruited. At the time of the inspection the school had one vacancy, which is filled by a suitably qualified supply teacher.
- The investment leaders have put into staff training has had a positive impact. Teachers are kept up to date with changes in their subject. All staff receive training to support pupils' behaviour and meet social and emotional needs. Staff appreciate the quality of the training they receive.
- Leaders systematically track the progress of pupils, and subject leaders promptly take action to support pupils who are falling behind. As a result, pupils quickly catch up with their learning.
- The quality of subject leaders' work has improved since the last inspection. Subject leaders now meet with teachers from the other sites to plan and monitor work. They are therefore knowledgeable about the quality of teaching and pupil progress in their subjects.
- The local authority has worked closely with the school. It has provided senior leaders with a good balance of support and challenge. Subject leaders have benefited from the training provided to develop their leadership. Senior leaders value the challenge provided as it has helped them evaluate the impact of the changes they have made.
- The executive headteacher is very successful in securing the funding to support disadvantaged pupils. Senior leaders consider the needs of individual pupils and use the money to provide academic and pastoral support. For example, support to improve attendance, access to GCSE subjects and more closely focused teaching.
- Improvements have been made to the curriculum since the last inspection. Pupils now have the opportunity to study English, mathematics and science at GCSE as well as level 1 and entry-level courses. Pupils have the opportunity to study subjects such as cookery, art, bicycle repair and car mechanics, either in school or through an off-site provider. Senior leaders have expanded the range of GCSE subjects offered to pupils this year to include Spanish and sociology. There is a need to expand the range of courses offered to further improve pupils' opportunities post-16.
- The curriculum is enhanced by a wealth of enrichment activities. Pupils participate in a range of sporting activities, including sailing and climbing. All pupils have the

opportunity to take part in work experience and the school offers trips and visits. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is well supported through the curriculum.

- Parents and carers are kept informed about their child's progress through half-termly meetings.

Governance of the school

- Until recently the management committee has been unable to recruit members with the required skills and knowledge. With the support of the local authority, the school has successfully recruited committee members with an appropriate range of skills and background. All committee members have a background in education.
- Members of the management committee have a clear understanding of their role and have very quickly identified the strengths and weaknesses in the provision. They are committed to improving standards and ask pertinent questions of senior leaders.
- There is a programme of training to ensure that all members of the management committee are trained according to the latest guidance. Pay awards for staff are scrutinised to ensure that they are appropriately based on performance. The management committee carry out their statutory duties effectively.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Senior leaders ensure that all the appropriate checks are carried out on staff before they are allowed to work with the pupils. The identity of all visitors to the school is rigorously checked. The school buildings are safe.
- All staff are trained annually according to the most up-to-date guidance. Staff are vigilant and skilled in identifying possible safeguarding concerns. Staff rigorously follow school procedures if they have a concern about any pupil.
- The school monitors the safeguarding arrangements of all the alternative providers they use to make sure they are effective.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching is typically good because teachers use the information from the assessment centre to plan work that is matched to the individual pupil's level of ability.
- Staff quickly get to know the pupils, and good relationships are a key feature of lessons. Staff are skilled in supporting pupils' personal development and in helping them to overcome the barriers which obstruct their learning. Pupils who have previously had a negative view of school now engage in their learning.
- Teachers use their strong subject knowledge to plan lessons that engage and enthuse pupils. Wherever possible, they link learning to pupils' interests or real-life situations, for example, using 'The Great Walpole Bake Off' as a theme in English to develop descriptive and creative writing vocabulary.
- Teaching assistants work well with teachers. Their subject knowledge and skills have improved since the last inspection. Inspectors saw examples of teaching assistants helping pupils to make progress by asking probing questions.
- Pupils' work is marked regularly and according to the school's marking policy. Teachers

give clear verbal or written guidance to pupils on how to improve their work. Most pupils take the time to improve their work as a result of the feedback they receive.

- Most teachers use questioning well to gauge pupils' understanding. Pupils are then moved on to the next task or given extra support. However, occasionally teachers give pupils too long to complete a task or fail to move them to the next activity when they have finished their work. This slows pupils' progress.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Pupils enter the school throughout the year. Almost all pupils are in key stage 4. The majority have been permanently excluded from school. To ensure that pupils get off to a good start, they attend the assessment centre for a three-week period. Here staff assess pupils' academic ability as well as their personal strengths, interests and barriers to learning. Pupils who are capable of high attainment and those who have special educational needs/and or disabilities are appropriately identified. The assessment process is a strength as it allows pupils to transfer smoothly to the teaching centres.
- Each morning, pupils are made to feel welcome at school. They start the day with their key worker, enabling them to identify any welfare issues that may affect the pupil concentrating on their school work. Wherever possible, these are dealt with straightaway so that learning can begin.
- There is a strong culture of care within the school. The school works highly effectively with external health and social care agencies. Together with the school's own psychologists and support workers, the school ensures that the broader needs of pupils and their families are very well catered for.
- During break and lunchtimes pupils and staff eat and socialise together. Relationships are positive as they are based on mutual respect.
- The pupils feel very safe in school. Pupils know that there is always an adult to talk to who will listen to their concerns. School records show that incidents of bullying and racism are very rare as pupils are taught the values of tolerance and respect for others.
- The curriculum supports pupils' health and well-being. In personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education lessons pupils are taught about internet safety, extremism, and radicalisation. Through cookery lessons pupils have the opportunity to prepare healthy meals. Sports lessons contribute to their physical fitness. Alongside these general lessons, the school also offers bespoke programmes built upon an individual's health and well-being needs.
- Pupils are appreciative of the support they receive from staff. Several pupils expressed the view that the school had given them a 'second chance'.
- Staff listen closely to the views of pupils and these have been used to develop the rewards system. Pupils enjoy receiving rewards and throughout the school there are displays celebrating pupils' achievements, promoting a culture of success.
- Staff meet at the start and end of the day to review pupils' progress. This provides the opportunity for them to identify any additional support individuals may require to support their well-being.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Staff are skilful at dealing with disruptive behaviour and providing pupils with the support they need to improve their behaviour. Pupils understand the school rules and the consequences of breaking them. Behaviour around the school and during social time is calm and orderly. Staff are quick to check any unacceptable language. Pupils respond quickly to requests from teachers.
- The school rigorously monitors pupils' behaviour. These records indicate that the behaviour of individual pupils has improved since joining the school.
- Most pupils arrive with a history of poor attendance, with some not having attended their previous school for a year or more. The school is relentless in following up poor attendance and working with pupils and their families, to the extent of imposing penalties on those whose attendance does not improve. Although the overall attendance of the school is below average, the actions of school leaders are having an impact. The attendance of the large majority of pupils is rapidly improving.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils enter the school with literacy and numeracy levels well below those typical for their age, due to gaps in their learning. In addition, many pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- School leaders recognise that for many pupils it is important to support their personal development and welfare if they are to engage in learning. Once this has been established, pupils settle to learning and make good progress from their starting points.
- Pupils have the opportunity to develop their writing skills across a range of subjects. Work in pupils' books indicates improvement in the quality of pupils' writing. Written work that demonstrates good progress is displayed in the 'good writing book' and is shared with all pupils. This book contains a range of different types of writing and clearly demonstrates good progress for these pupils.
- Pupils have the opportunity to read books in lessons, and those who read to the inspectors were able to break down words in order to read them. However, most pupils are reluctant readers and only read in lessons. Some key workers provide the opportunity for pupils to read books and newspapers in the morning, but it is not common practice throughout the school. Pupils would benefit from reading a range of materials to further develop their reading skills.
- Pupils make good progress in science and they enjoy the practical investigations. They ask questions in these lessons which develop their understanding and broaden their knowledge.
- Progress in mathematics is improving. Work in pupils' exercise books indicates that opportunities to develop their reasoning skills through problem-solving are limited. Pupils do not get the same opportunity to use mathematics in other subjects as they do in English.
- The school offers a range of qualifications from entry level to GCSE in mathematics, English and science. In 2015 over half of Year 11 pupils who sat GCSE in these subjects achieved a grade in one or more subjects. This represents good progress from

pupils' individual starting points.

- The high proportion of disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress. The overwhelming majority of Year 11 pupils who left in 2016 gained a nationally recognised qualification in mathematics, English and science. School progress information and work in pupils' books indicate that pupils currently in the school are on track to gain qualifications in all three subjects.
- Pupils who attend vocational placements achieve well. Pupils follow courses and gain qualifications which allow them to progress to further education or training. Many continue with their original course.
- Pupils receive independent careers advice and high-quality support from school staff when choosing their post-16 programme. Staff support pupils with their applications and interview preparation. Pupils receive visits from staff during the summer holiday and when they start their college or training programme. As a result of this excellent support, almost all pupils entered training, education or employment in 2016.

School details

Unique reference number	140121
Local authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	10019628

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	8–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	38
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Chair	Emma Laflin
Executive Headteacher	Judith Sherington
Telephone number	01502 565646
Website	www.theattic.suffolk.sch.uk
Email address	admin@theattic.suffolk.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	17–18 September 2014

Information about this school

- The school caters for up to 40 pupils aged eight to 16 who have been excluded from school or who are at risk of permanent exclusion. At the time of the inspection most pupils were in key stage 4.
- The school has three sites. The main site is in Lowestoft, where pupils attend full time. The assessment centre is based three miles away in Carlton Colville. The third centre is 20 miles from Lowestoft in Walpole, near Halesworth. Pupils on the Walpole site attend part time, either for the morning or the afternoon. For the remainder of the day, pupils either transfer to the Lowestoft site, undertake work experience or attend alternative providers. At the time of the inspection a new site opened. This did not form part of the inspection.
- The school also provides some outreach work to pupils in their homes.
- Pupils join the school throughout the year as it has the responsibility to provide education to all who are excluded from school within six days of the exclusion.

- The majority of pupils are of White British heritage. There are more boys than girls on the school roll.
- A large proportion of pupils have special educational needs. A number of these pupils have an educational, health and care plan.
- The proportion of pupils entitled to support through the pupil premium funding is well above average. A small number of pupils are looked after by the local authority.
- Five alternative providers are used to complement the education provided by the school. Pupils also go off-site for sporting activities. The school does not receive any primary school physical education and sports funding.
- The school does not meet requirements on the publication of information regarding end of key stage examination results.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited eight lessons and made two shorter visits to classes to observe the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. They were accompanied by senior leaders for two of these observations. The inspectors also looked at the work in pupils' books and scrutinised samples of pupils' work displayed around the school.
- The inspectors looked at pupils' work from the last academic year to gauge pupils' progress.
- Inspectors listened to a small group of pupils read.
- Inspectors met with the executive headteacher and heads of each site.
- Inspectors observed behaviour around the school, including break and lunchtime. They spoke informally with a number of pupils.
- Meetings were held with subject leaders, the chair of the management committee and a representative from the local authority. The lead inspector had a telephone conversation with a parent.
- Inspectors visited the three school sites and Breakout in Lowestoft, one of the alternative providers used by the school.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation, including school policies, the school's self-evaluation, safeguarding documents, pupil progress information, attendance data and behaviour records.
- There were not enough responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, for the inspectors to consider.

Inspection team

Caroline Pardy, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Joanna Rand

Ofsted Inspector

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