

Inspection of a school judged good for overall effectiveness before September 2024: ACE Schools Plymouth

Martins Gate, Bretonside, Plymouth, Devon PL4 0AT

Inspection dates:

22 and 23 October 2024

Outcome

ACE Schools Plymouth has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at the previous inspection.

The executive headteacher of this school is Ruth Westwood. This school is part of the Transforming Futures Trust which means other people in the trust have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the interim chief executive officer, Sandra Harris, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Carole Burgoyne.

What is it like to attend this school?

ACE Schools Plymouth provides a calm and nurturing environment. Pupils have arrived from multiple failed placements elsewhere. Parents and carers are highly positive about how staff look beyond their child's special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), accepting them for who they are.

Pupils experience success because staff understand their individual needs extremely well and have high expectations of what they can, and do, achieve. Pupils comment how staff 'massively look after us' and 'want to see us get far in life.' As a result, many pupils' attendance improves. The school places high importance on the curriculum, especially the core skills of reading, writing and mathematics. Built into the curriculum is a highly individualised therapeutic approach.

Staff have high expectations for pupils' behaviour. Pupils and staff follow the school's approach to behaviour. Pupils behave well in lessons and social situations. When pupils struggle with their emotions, staff take effective and supportive action, enabling pupils to re-engage with their learning.

Excellent pastoral support and positive relationships with adults help pupils to feel valued. Pupils have a voice. They comment on how staff listen to them and 'don't jump to conclusions.' Pupils trust adults and know they are there to help and support them.

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

The ethos of 'ready, respectful and safe' is central to the success of ACE Schools Plymouth. Everything the school does is about supporting pupils to realise their potential. Typically, pupils do their best and achieve well from often low starting points. Pupils recognise they have many gaps in their knowledge, which they are keen to remove. They show positive attitudes towards their learning and strive to overcome their challenges. Staff make careful checks on pupils' prior knowledge and emotional well-being on arrival at the school. They use this information to plan bespoke packages of support. These ensure pupils gain the necessary knowledge and the specialist therapeutic interventions they need to be successful. However, the school has not checked the impact of the curriculum in some subjects across all provisions. Therefore, it does not have a full picture of how well pupils learn the intended curriculum.

The school focuses on the core subjects of reading, writing, mathematics and science. This helps prepare pupils for their next steps in college or work. For example, pupils in Years 10 and 11 spoke knowledgeably about the digestive system in science. Pupils successfully study a range of qualifications, including GCSEs in English, mathematics, science and history and achieve well.

The school prioritises pupils' personal development. It provides pupils with rich developmental experiences, such as rock climbing and diving. Pupils speak positively regarding the wealth of enrichment opportunities such as three-dimensional printing and go-karting. Such opportunities support the development of pupils' perseverance, resilience, leadership and teamwork skills.

Personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education is planned carefully. Pupils are taught the knowledge they need to lead healthy and successful lives. They talk with confidence about the importance of personal hygiene and the need to keep safe when online.

The school does not put a ceiling on pupils' aspirations. Each provision provides helpful careers guidance to prepare pupils for their next steps. Pupils successfully go on to college, apprenticeships or into the world of work.

The school is proactive in finding out what pupils and families need and how best to provide it. The school promotes positive mental health for pupils, their families and staff and offers effective support and guidance to those who need it.

The trust provides important support and challenge to leaders. However, many members of the local governing body are new. This means they have not had the time to assure themselves of the impact of the school's work in all areas.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The school has not checked the impact of the curriculum in some subjects across all the provisions. This means they are not sure how well the curriculum is being implemented for all pupils. The trust should ensure that rigorous systems are in place to check the effectiveness of the curriculum and its impact on pupils' learning.
- Most of the local governing committee are new to the school. Therefore, they have not had the time to assure themselves of the impact of the school's work in all areas. The trust needs to continue to develop the role of the governors so they can hold leaders to account and fully develop the strategic oversight of the school's work.

Background

Until September 2024, on a graded (section 5) inspection we gave schools an overall effectiveness grade, in addition to the key and provision judgements. Overall effectiveness grades given before September 2024 will continue to be visible on school inspection reports and on Ofsted's website. From September 2024 graded inspections will not include an overall effectiveness grade. This school was, before September 2024, judged to be good for its overall effectiveness.

We have now inspected the school to determine whether it has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at that previous inspection. 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's work has improved significantly or that it may not be as strong as it was at the last inspection, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection. A graded inspection 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 first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good for overall effectiveness in February 2019.

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	142835
Local authority	Plymouth
Inspection number	10322304
Type of school	Alternative provision
School category	Academy alternative provision converter
Age range of pupils	4 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	255
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	4
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Carole Burgoyne
CEO of the trust	Sandra Harris (interim CEO)
Executive Headteacher	Ruth Westwood
Website	www.aceschools.transformingfutures.org.uk
Dates of previous inspection	13 and 14 February 2019

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 Transforming Futures Trust in September 2020. Under the predecessor trust, ACE Schools Multi-Academy Trust, Ace Schools Plymouth was judged to be good in February 2019.
- 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 Primary is the primary base for pupils aged 4 to 11. The pupils on this site have been excluded or at risk of exclusion from mainstream school. At the time of this inspection, there were no Reception children attending this provision.

- ACE Dover Road is the main teaching bases 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 wrap-around services in Plymouth, three sites in Cornwall and a site in Exeter, Devon. These services are individually commissioned provisions for children with complex SEND who, for various reasons, may be unable to be placed within any local, mainstream or specialist provision.
- ACE provides outreach tuition for pupils who require education at home.
- ACE provides forest school provision at Poole Farm in Plymouth for children from age 5 to 16 who are struggling to access the mainstream setting or main ACE base due to their complex SEND or social, emotional and mental health needs.
- ACE Schools Plymouth use 21 unregistered and two registered alternative provisions.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation 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.
- Inspectors visited the Bretonside, ACE Primary, Dover Road, North Hill and Plym Bridge sites in Plymouth and the Launceston site in Cornwall. Senior leaders accompanied them.
- Inspectors focused inspection activity on the following groups of subjects: English, mathematics, science, PSHE and citizenship. For each group of subjects, inspectors visited a sample of lessons, heard pupils read, spoke with pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors met with the executive headteacher, the deputy headteacher, senior leaders and staff.
- The lead inspector held telephone conversations with the chair of trustees, the chair of the local board of governors, the interim CEO and the deputy CEO.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the provision sites. The inspectors met with school leaders to discuss and scrutinise how they respond to behaviour incidents and pupils' attendance.

- Inspectors considered the responses to the staff and pupil surveys, Ofsted’s online survey, Ofsted Parent View, including free-text replies. An inspector also spoke to parents at the start of the day.

Inspection team

Jen Southall, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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Ofsted Inspector

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Ofsted Inspector

Claire Thomson

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