

Challenger Centre

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	134325
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	381671
Inspection dates	12–13 September 2011
Reporting inspector	David Scott

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	11–14
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	7
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Chair	Allan Barhan
Headteacher	Jenny Chapman
Date of previous school inspection	14 May 2009
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one additional inspector. The inspector observed teaching and learning in seven part-lessons, seeing all six teachers and, in most cases, accompanied by the acting headteacher. Meetings were held with the acting headteacher, a member of the management committee, staff, students and the link adviser. The inspector observed the centre's work, and looked at self-evaluation documentation, monitoring and assessment information, lesson plans and school policies. He analysed questionnaires from five staff and three parents and carers. The centre's safeguarding procedures were also evaluated.

The inspector reviewed many aspects of the centre's work and looked at a number of key areas.

- How effectively is the centre boosting attainment for individual students, given the short-term nature of their placements?
- How well is the centre fostering learning and academic progress?
- Have the actions to overcome weaknesses identified in the previous inspection been effective enough to confirm that the centre has satisfactory or better capacity for sustained improvement?
- What is the impact of leaders and managers at all levels, including the management committee, on driving improvements?

Information about the school

The Challenger Centre caters for up to 16 Key Stage 3 students from the local authority who have been permanently excluded or are on time-out placements from mainstream schools. Its aim is to reintegrate these students into mainstream education as quickly as possible. All students have special educational needs and/or disabilities, invariably associated with behavioural, emotional and social needs. Most students are of White British heritage. None speaks English as an additional language. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is well above average. The centre has gained the Healthy Schools Award.

Since the previous inspection a number of changes have taken place in the leadership and management of the centre. The acting headteacher took up his position in September 2011.

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

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?**3****The school's capacity for sustained improvement****3**

Main findings

The Challenger Centre provides a satisfactory standard of education. The centre has undergone recent significant changes of senior leaders and its priority has been to re-establish a shared vision among all staff in order to raise attainment and to bring about a greater sense of belonging.

The centre is a welcoming community where students are happy. Students' awareness of spiritual, moral, social and cultural issues is promoted appropriately. They demonstrate tolerance and empathy as they try to resolve disputes by developing a sense of what is acceptable conduct, and as a result behaviour is satisfactory. They feel safe and respect the views of others and are confident that the rare cases of bullying are addressed promptly. Students have a mature appreciation of what constitutes a healthy lifestyle and this is reflected in the centre's national award in this area.

Students' attainment is improving, although it is broadly average overall, but with particular weaknesses in literacy and numeracy. This is because many students experience a legacy of disruptive behaviour and underachievement, with many having a poor record of attendance. While almost all improve their attendance when compared to their previous school, the overall attendance rate remains low because of a few persistent absentees who make too little progress in their learning and in dealing with their difficulties. Nevertheless, from low starting points when they enter the centre, most students make increasingly fast progress and achieve satisfactorily because staff work effectively to meet students' individual needs.

The quality of teaching is satisfactory and sometimes good. When learning activities are active and well matched to students' skills and enthusiasm, their progress accelerates and behaviour is good. Nevertheless, teachers do not routinely take opportunities to promote students' literacy and numeracy skills in all subjects. In some lessons, teachers' explanations are too long and they do not engage students consistently as active participants in lessons.

Staff have been successful in improving students' academic performance and sustaining effective practice in supporting their personal development. However, not all leaders and managers are focused on evaluating the impact of teaching on learning using measurable success criteria to accelerate achievement. Currently, the balance of responsibilities is uneven and there is insufficient delegation of roles to

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ensure that the centre's priorities receive as much attention as possible. Nevertheless, self-evaluation is honest and broadly accurate. As a result, since the previous inspection, the implementation of assessment procedures and the systematic collection of performance information have improved so that students' progress is now effectively monitored. These actions demonstrate satisfactory capacity to make further improvements.

Up to 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen teaching to accelerate students' progress in lessons and raise attainment, in all subjects, by:
 - ensuring teachers provide challenging activities matched to the needs of all students
 - supporting the development of students' literacy and numeracy skills
 - asking more probing questions in lessons which give students opportunities to develop their speaking skills and explain their ideas fully
 - ensuring students develop as active learners in order to challenge their thinking and accelerate progress
 - reviewing targets more systematically with students so that they clearly understand what to do to improve their work.
- Sharpen the impact of leaders and managers in driving improvement by:
 - ensuring that tracking and monitoring information is analysed robustly and the impact of new developments is judged against clear success criteria
 - delegating responsibilities more evenly and ensuring roles are clarified and focused on the centre's priorities.
- Improve attendance levels by providing specific support for those students with persistent absence.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**3**

Typically, students join the centre with levels of learning that are below those expected for their age. Most make satisfactory progress against their targets for learning. This is as a result of effective guidance and one-to-one support. Despite this success, staff are not complacent and work effectively to help students gain alternative accreditation in basic skills subjects. As a result, this prepares students appropriately for the next stage of their school career. Nevertheless, the poorest attenders make too little progress in their learning and in dealing with their difficulties. The centre acknowledges that these students need more support.

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All students have special educational needs. Progress is good in the lessons that match with students' learning needs. In the lessons in which students are active in their learning, for example, in those in information and communication technology (ICT) and in food studies, they routinely work hard, show positive attitudes and behave well. The good relationships they have with their teachers and teaching assistants help make these lessons purposeful, friendly and fun events that are enjoyed by students and staff alike. For example, in one lesson in food studies students enjoyed learning to make an apple crumble. They listened well, worked hard, used their tools correctly, paid due regard to hygiene considerations and were proud of their finished dish. However, not all teachers take the opportunity to improve students' limited literacy and numeracy skills by relating their activities to real-life situations across all subject areas.

Students' contribution to their own and other communities is appropriately developed. The 'school voice' is becoming increasingly effective as the formal forum through which students can impact on the running of the centre. The small number of students at the centre means that their opinions and thoughts are easily known to staff. The good relationships students have with staff are shown in many ways, for example, in the way they listen to staff offering support and advice and in the respectful way they interact with staff during the outdoor activity sessions. This is also evident from the way they worked with staff toward successfully gaining the Healthy Schools award, a project which has the additional benefit of reinforcing the importance of maintaining a healthy lifestyle. The refurbishment of the centre's kitchen is a direct result of this initiative, as is greater participation in the physical and sporting activities available during the afternoons.

Awareness of wider national and international communities is gained primarily through the curriculum and by fundraising for the local church and cancer charities and by writing letters to underprivileged children in a school in The Gambia. The significant gains they make in developing their self-confidence support their growing awareness of the importance of spiritual issues in their lives, such as trust, belief and friendship.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	3

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

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Pupils' behaviour	3
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	3
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	4
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

How effective is the provision?

To help students gain full access to learning, the curriculum focuses on personal, social and health education, history and on the core subjects of English, mathematics, science and ICT. The afternoon enrichment sessions in sports, such as bowling, skiing, skating, swimming and sailing, together with cooking, art and craft and model-making, provide good opportunities for students to learn skills and to control their behaviour and emotions in different settings. These activities make a good contribution to accelerating the progress students make. Visits and residential trips provide good opportunities for students to broaden their personal, social, sporting skills.

Teaching is overall satisfactory, and sometimes good, but it does not regularly enthuse students with a love of learning or appreciation of how learning relates to their present lives. Since the previous inspection, improvements have been made in the collection of data and assessment procedures; for example, through the moderation of internal judgements by external advisers of the quality of students' written work. However, this good practice has not been shared routinely across all subject areas and, as a result, the impact has been too variable. In some lessons teachers' explanations are too long, with students not being actively engaged in learning or given questions that challenge and help them to develop their thinking skills. Target setting and marking do not always signpost clearly enough how students can improve.

The centre is rightly proud of its effective pastoral support and guidance. Students whose circumstances make them the most vulnerable benefit from partnerships with external agencies. Staff help students overcome difficult and challenging episodes in their lives. They provide a wide range of support to help students whose circumstances make them vulnerable play a full part in centre life. The team is increasingly successful at engaging with families with challenging histories.

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These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	3

How effective are leadership and management?

Although some weaknesses remain, there have been sustained improvements to outcomes for students which have been brought about by leaders and managers. Staff work as a team and their expectations of students have risen. They know the strengths of the centre and share the vision to improve and sustain achievement for all students. Strategies for improving weaker teaching have been implemented through well-considered training programmes delivered by the local authority. Consequently, teaching is improving, and learning and progress are accelerating. Nevertheless, currently, the spread and balance of leadership roles is uneven, with insufficient delegation of responsibilities. This has sometimes led to only partial coverage of the centre's priorities. Also, the analysis of students' performance data by some staff is not sufficiently rigorous to improve teaching and accelerate learning in all classes.

Staff are committed to ensuring equality of opportunity and inclusion for all. Students whose circumstances make them vulnerable or who previously displayed challenging behaviour now often enjoy their learning and make the expected progress. Partnerships with local schools are improving, as are links with other agencies, which contributes effectively to the pupils' increasingly steady progress. The centre has a detailed understanding of its own community and the different ethnicities and cultures represented. However, the school is at an early stage of raising pupils' understanding of the broader national context.

The management committee is very supportive of the centre, fulfils all its statutory duties and is becoming increasingly confident at holding the centre to account for students' achievement. Effective procedures are in place concerning safeguarding and risk assessment. These meet all government guidelines and include a carefully planned approach to child protection and the management of students' safety, which contributes to their appropriate understanding of how to keep themselves safe.

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These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Views of parents and carers

Although only three responses were received to the parents' and carers' questionnaires, this proportion represented a high return. All responses were positive. During the inspection the centre's own recent survey was examined and this too indicated high levels of satisfaction.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Challenger Centre to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspector received three completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are seven pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	2	67	1	33	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	2	67	1	33	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	2	67	1	33	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	1	33	1	33	1	33	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	3	100	0	0	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	2	67	1	33	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	2	67	1	33	0	0	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	1	100	0	0	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	2	67	1	33	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	2	67	0	0	1	33	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	2	67	1	33	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	2	67	1	33	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	2	67	0	0	1	33	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

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.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
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.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 08 April 2011 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
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.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
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.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



14 September 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Challenger Centre, Sittingbourne ME10 1JB

Thank you very much for the very warm welcome you gave me when I visited your centre recently. I very much enjoyed meeting and seeing you at work and recreation. I very much valued the discussions I had with you and was particularly pleased to see the way you get along and treat each other with respect.

You go to a satisfactory centre and since the previous inspection you are now making faster progress in your subjects. You, and your parents and carers, told us that Challenger is a caring and happy place where you feel very safe.

All your teachers are determined to help you succeed and give you the best possible education. I have asked them to:

- plan work that will challenge and engage you in all lessons and develop your speaking skills by showing you ways to learn by yourselves
- give you clearer advice on how to improve your work so that you can achieve your very best
- look closely and regularly at information about your performance and to share with you how best you can make improvements in all subjects
- help you to gain a good record of attendance
- ensure that leadership responsibilities are spread more evenly to ensure that full attention is given to all of the centre's priorities.

You too can all play your part in improving the centre by working hard to achieve your targets and by following your teachers' advice when your work is marked. Also, by attending every day and arranging non-urgent appointments after school. Once again, it was very good to meet you all and I wish you all at Challenger the best for the future.

Yours sincerely

David Scott
Lead inspector

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