

Will Adams Centre

Inspection report

Unique reference number	133767
Local authority	Medway
Inspection number	381556
Inspection dates	4–5 July 2012
Lead inspector	Jon Carter

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	14–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	44
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Headteacher	Karen Bennett
Date of previous school inspection	4 February 2009
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Age group	14–16
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Introduction

Inspection team

Jon Carter

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspector observed 12 lessons taught by nine teachers and other appropriately qualified support staff. Meetings were held with the Chair of the Management Committee and a representative from the local authority, members of staff at the school and a group of students. The inspector observed the school's work, and looked at lesson planning documents, assessment information, the school leaders' analysis of students' progress, records of lesson monitoring and the school's self-evaluation. He also analysed responses from the three questionnaires received from parents and carers, as well as those from 11 students and 16 staff.

Information about the school

The Will Adams Centre is a small pupil referral unit for Key Stage 4 students with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. There is currently an even balance of boys and girls attending the school. In previous years, most students were boys. The school makes provision for students who are at risk of permanent exclusion or who have been permanently excluded from mainstream schools. All students are from White British backgrounds. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals and the proportion of students who join the school other than at the normal times are above average. Many students referred to the school have a history of poor attendance.

Since the previous inspection, there have been significant changes to staff in leadership positions. There is currently an acting headteacher in charge of the school.

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	3
Achievement of pupils	3
Quality of teaching	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils	3
Leadership and management	3

Key findings

- This is a satisfactory school. It is not yet good because the quality of teaching and the effectiveness of systems for tracking and evaluating students' progress are not consistently good across the school. Schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.
- Overall, students make satisfactory progress in most of the subjects that they study, including mathematics and science. In English, most students make accelerated progress in their learning. This is because of a successful school focus on improving students' literacy skills. Most students leave the school with a range of accredited awards and move on successfully to further education.
- Teaching is satisfactory. Staff have a comprehensive knowledge of the students they teach but do not always use assessment information effectively to personalise learning for individual students. Written feedback celebrating good attitudes to work rebuilds students' self-esteem well. However, teachers do not follow the school's marking policy consistently to ensure that students know what they need to do to improve. This is not monitored effectively enough by school leaders.
- Students' behaviour and attitudes to learning improve well, resulting in engagement with learning that is at least satisfactory and often better. The learning activities offered are valued by most students and encourage them to improve their attendance. Nevertheless, not all of the students attend school regularly enough to benefit from the range of opportunities provided.
- The headteacher evaluates the school's strengths and weaknesses accurately and honestly. This ensures that training to improve teachers' performance is well focused. Progress tracking systems do not consistently and effectively identify gaps in students' learning in all subjects. The management committee does not visit the school frequently enough to be able to challenge leaders well about the school's performance.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching from satisfactory to good by ensuring that:
 - teachers use assessment information effectively to plan lessons that are personalised to students' individual needs
 - teachers consistently follow the school's marking policy when marking students' work and providing written feedback about their progress
 - school leaders regularly monitor the quality of teachers' marking and written feedback to students.

- Improve the effectiveness of systems for tracking and evaluating students' progress, by ensuring that:
 - a common format for recording students' progress is established and used consistently by all members of staff
 - school leaders analyse students' achievements more frequently to check they are making accelerated progress over time.

- Improve the management committee's contribution to the strategic leadership of the centre, by ensuring that:
 - the membership and availability of the committee is strengthened through the appointment of additional members, including those who can represent the views of parents and carers
 - regular, scheduled visits are carried out by all members to gather first-hand information about the day-to-day work of the school.

- Improve students' attendance, so that a greater proportion of students achieve at least average levels of attendance, by:
 - targeting school resources, including transport, to secure rapid improvement for the group of students closest to national average levels
 - engaging the support of other services in working with particularly hard to reach students and families.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Students, all of whom have special educational needs, make at least satisfactory progress in lessons. Their progress in English is often accelerated because all lessons have a focus on literacy skills. Students regularly get to read aloud in class and are encouraged to participate positively in discussions and respond to questions. This makes an effective contribution to developing their independent learning skills as they develop greater confidence. Consequently, their engagement with school improves as the fear of failure diminishes.

Progress in other subjects, including mathematics and science, is satisfactory. This is because the learning activities in lessons are not always well matched to students'

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abilities through effective use of assessment data. As a result, the expectations placed on some students are not high enough and they do not always make the progress of which they are capable. Boys and girls make progress at similar rates to each other. Those known to be eligible for free school meals make comparable progress to other students.

Meaningful links between subjects help students practise and consolidate their basic skills. Vocational and other practical classes are often particularly effective in providing students with opportunities to successfully apply their numeracy and literacy skills to real-life situations. For example, in a fashion and fabrics lesson, students calculated portion sizes for filling the gift boxes they had previously made with chocolate and shortbread.

Students' levels of attainment on referral to the school are often below average for their age because of disruptions to their education due to exclusion. While they make good progress in English and practical subjects such as art, levels of attainment remain below average overall. Increasingly, students who complete Year 11 at the school leave with a range of appropriate qualifications from Entry Level to GCSE. A large majority of students demonstrate successful re-engagement with learning by going on to take up and sustain college placements when they leave school. This number is also increasing year on year.

While only a few parents and carers returned questionnaires, all made positive comments, for example, 'His progress has come on so well.' This reflects the impact of increased engagement with learning seen during the inspection.

Quality of teaching

Where teaching is most effective, planning takes good account of students' strengths and preferences to engage them well. For example, in an English lesson for Year 10 students, the teacher linked the use of similes with rap music which provided an engaging connection with their interests. However, the effective use of assessment information to ensure that students receive personalised and appropriately challenging work is not well established across the school. While staff often have a sound awareness of students' abilities and needs, they do not always use this well to plan lessons that build effectively on what students already know and can do. Sometimes this problem is exacerbated because there is not a common format of recording the small steps of progress made by students and the systems in place are not used consistently well across the school. Consequently, detailed information about the gaps in students' knowledge is either not available or not used effectively.

Students' behavioural needs and lost confidence in education are often overcome effectively by positive verbal and written feedback from staff. However, the marking of students' work is not always consistent with the school's policy. As a result, students who have successfully overcome their reluctance to accept constructive criticism do not always benefit from clear advice about how to improve their work or take the next steps in their learning. Appropriate importance is attached to

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promoting students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, particularly through activities which take students out of the classroom environment, for example the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme.

Parents and carers are clear that they consider teaching at the school to be supporting improved outcomes for their children. This view is substantiated by inspection evidence.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students typically demonstrate improvements in their behaviour compared with the difficulties they experienced in mainstream schools. As a result, lessons are usually free from disruption. Increasingly, students behave well in class because they reciprocate the respect shown to them by staff. In half of the lessons observed during the inspection, students' engagement and behaviour were good. Students have a sound understanding of what constitutes bullying and the forms it may take. The school has comprehensive systems for dealing with and recording any incidents that occur. Students indicate that prejudice is challenged quickly by staff and that bullying of any kind only occurs rarely. Consequently, they feel safe in school, a view supported by their parents and carers.

The majority of students improve their attendance while at the school, particularly those who are referred at the beginning of Year 10 and remain on roll into Year 11. Systems for encouraging better attendance are highly personalised and visible within the school. Nevertheless, some students do not attend school as regularly as they should. The school takes action to monitor and address this issue but does not always target its resources well to secure rapid improvement. For example, some of the students who are close to achieving levels of attendance in line with national averages are selected for support while others are not. Close liaison with the local authority's attendance service ensures that the school takes appropriate action where students' attendance is of particularly serious cause for concern. However, links with other statutory and voluntary services are less well developed in helping the school reach students and families who are reluctant to engage with education.

Parents and carers point out that their children's attitudes to learning change when they join the school. Typical comments note that students 'enjoy learning' and 'build their self-esteem'. While inspection evidence shows that this is the case for most students, those who do not attend the school regularly have limited access to the school's successful systems. Students are equally positive about the school and attribute many of the changes they make to the care and attention they receive from staff. One student summed up the importance of the work of the school from his perspective when he said, 'They make you realise it's your last chance.'

Leadership and management

The headteacher and the small staff team are motivated and reflective practitioners who are constantly involved in self-review of the effectiveness of the school. Some

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aspects of leadership are better established than others following recent changes to personnel. For example, monitoring of the quality of teaching in lessons is regular and appropriately focused. Consequently, there is a sound and accurate understanding of what the school does well and what it needs to do to improve. However, the monitoring of teachers' use of the school's marking policy and the frequency of school leaders' analysis of progress are not regular enough and inconsistencies remain.

Staff respond well to professional development so that changes to their practice quickly start to have an impact on improving outcomes for students. For example, the recent focus on literacy has ensured that teachers have increasingly planned opportunities in lessons for students to read. This has had a positive effect on students' confidence and abilities, which has permeated other subjects. The accurate and insightful evaluation of the school's strengths and areas for development, and the positive involvement of most staff in improving the school's systems demonstrate that the school has capacity to improve.

Members of the management committee provide support to the headteacher and meet regularly. However, other professional commitments often preclude them from visiting the school regularly to gain first-hand knowledge of students' day-to-day experiences in the classroom. Consequently, members recognise that the level of challenge they are able to offer is not always as effective as it could be in driving improvement. Moreover, the committee does not have a wide representation within its ranks, particularly of parents and carers.

Overall, the school matches its curriculum effectively to the academic and emotional needs of students and provides bright and conducive learning environments within classrooms. The curriculum, particularly in practical and creative subjects where spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are strongest, often provides students with the inspiration they need to take increased responsibility for their own learning and destinations. Access to equipment in information and communication technology, for example, has led to one ex-student successfully setting up his own business making music videos. However, the quality of dedicated provision for other subjects, for example science, is severely restricted by the amount of available space in the small building.

School leaders ensure that arrangements for safeguarding students' health and well-being meet current government requirements through appropriate recruitment checks and regular refresher training for all staff. While the school actively seeks to avoid discrimination and promote equality through making all aspects of its provision available to all students, the impact of the school's actions are currently only satisfactory because not all students attend school as regularly as they should.

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	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September to 31 December 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data 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.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

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

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance:	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour:	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Floor standards:	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety:	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.



5 July 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of Will Adams Centre, Gillingham ME7 2BX

Thank you for welcoming me when I inspected the school recently. My particular thanks go to those of you who volunteered to meet with me and, of course, let me taste the chocolate shortbread that you had cooked! It was very clear from speaking with you and reading your questionnaires that you are happy at school and appreciate the strong relationships you have with the staff. This letter is to tell you about the findings of the inspection.

The Will Adams Centre is a satisfactory school where students make satisfactory progress in most subjects and accelerated progress in English. Most leave the school with a range of accredited awards and move on successfully to further education. Teaching at the school is satisfactory. Staff have positive relationships with students but do not always personalise learning well for individuals. The school helps students re-engage with learning; attitudes and behaviour in class are often good – well done! Students appreciate the range of learning activities offered but some do not attend school regularly enough to benefit from them and therefore don't make as much progress. The headteacher has an accurate knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Training for teachers is helping to continue to improve the school.

I have asked the headteacher to focus on making the following improvements.

- Increase the number of good lessons by personalising learning for all students.
- Improve the school's systems for tracking and evaluating students' progress.
- Improve how well the management committee helps to lead the school.
- Improve students' attendance at school.

You can all help by making every effort to come to school every day, ready for a new challenge.

Yours sincerely
Jon Carter
Lead inspector

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