

Adams' Grammar School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123593
Local Authority	Telford and Wrekin
Inspection number	314647
Inspection dates	23–24 January 2008
Reporting inspector	Graham Sims

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Grammar (selective)
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	540
6th form	251
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Joff Hamilton
Headteacher	Jim Richardson
Date of previous school inspection	2 February 2004
School address	High Street Newport TF10 7BD
Telephone number	01952 386300
Fax number	01952 812696

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Adams' Grammar School is smaller than most secondary schools. It is a popular and oversubscribed day and boarding school for boys. Each year, some boys and girls from a very wide area join its sixth form from other schools. It is a Haberdashers' Company school. The student population is very stable, with very few leaving or joining part way through the year. A much smaller than average proportion of students have learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

The school has had technology college status for many years, acquired modern language college status in April 2006 and became a training school in April 2007. The school has two sites more than a mile apart, with one used predominantly for boarding and for games.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

'What a fantastic school!' This succinct expression of a parent of a boy in Year 7 is echoed in the comments of many parents with sons in other year groups. Comments from parents of students in the sixth form are equally effusive, for example: 'just outstanding!', 'the past seven years have been literally a joy'. There are occasional concerns, but they are hard to find amongst the outpouring of parental appreciation for this outstanding school.

Academic standards are exceptionally high throughout the school and students' achievement is excellent. The attainment of students coming into Year 7, as shown by their end of Year 6 national tests in English, mathematics and science, is already high. However, the gap between the school's results and the national average at the end of Year 9 increases significantly, and does so yet again when students take their GCSE examinations. Achievement in the sixth form is no less impressive, with almost half of the students making significantly greater progress than most other students of similar ability in other schools.

A combination of factors account for students' exceptional progress. The school provides excellent care, guidance and support to ensure that students remain on track. Electronic communication is used extensively and impressively to ensure that parents receive frequent feedback on any concerns or commendations for their children. The students are highly motivated, partly as a result of their home background, but also because there are so many opportunities for them to find fulfilment in the outstanding range of extra-curricular opportunities available to them at school. Students' determination to succeed enables them to make excellent progress even when the teaching is only satisfactory or good. There is a significant amount of outstanding teaching, but some teaching does not take enough account of different learning styles or risk new methods which could enable even more students to reach the highest grades. The school recognises this and has given a few teachers the responsibility for helping staff to develop excellent lessons. Their initiatives are starting to change some of the more staid teaching.

The great majority of students find wonderful fulfilment in their life at Adams', developing in an excellent way into mature, well-rounded, interested young citizens. A group of students in Years 7 to 9 explained enthusiastically how the school caters for every taste – the budding academic, the sporting fanatic, the keen musician – and that each feels comfortable in pursuing his own interests, knowing that others will respect the choices he has made. The house system is a strong and forceful factor in helping students to develop their sense of community, their ability to enjoy competition and their concern for others through charitable work or community involvement.

The school has benefited from outstanding leadership at many levels. The school's most senior leaders have had the wisdom to avoid petty bureaucracy, allowing staff to develop their interests for the benefit of the students. At times, however, this results in self-evaluation which is not quite rigorous enough, particularly when evaluating the quality of some of the teaching. Nevertheless, there is a very clear sense of direction and an overriding ambition to make continual improvement, seen in the steady rise in the school's results over many years and the involvement of students in an ever-widening range of activities. The influence of the school's technology, language and training school specialisms is evident in many ways. Above all, however, the school's leaders have developed a community with a wonderful ethos where staff

and students all give of their best and enjoy living and working together. This is, indeed, a truly impressive school.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

Students' achievement in the sixth form is excellent. Standards are very high and grades have improved over the last few years. In 2007, almost three-quarters of all passes at A level were at grades A or B, with particularly strong results in the school's specialist areas. Retention rates are very high, with most Year 11 students staying on into Years 12 and 13. Almost all students leave the school to study in higher education, with very many being accepted into the most prestigious universities. The quality of the teaching is good. Many lessons are challenging, giving students the appropriate knowledge and skills to attain high standards. Students are engaged in lessons and display good levels of knowledge. Some lessons, however, do not sufficiently develop independent learning. Girls are integrated well into the life of the school. A very small number of girls reported that, although they were satisfied with their overall provision, they would prefer greater variety in teaching.

The students are very well motivated and articulate, and have an outstanding attitude to learning. They have high levels of responsibility in the day-to-day running of the school and they rise to this challenge. For example, house prefects support and encourage younger students. Students appreciate the emphasis on academic attainment and, in particular, the very wide range of extra-curricular activities provided. The curriculum is very well matched to the students' needs and has recently improved with the addition of courses such as the sports leadership programme and musical appreciation. Excellent leadership and management ensures a clear focus on improving students' grades and supporting them in their aspirations.

Effectiveness of boarding provision

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 8

The school's provision for boarding and its effectiveness in promoting students' personal development and well-being are outstanding. Boarders form strong friendships with other boarders, though not to the detriment of their relationships with day students. They feel safe in their boarding houses, and thoroughly enjoy the extra-curricular programme of activities. The school encourages responsible behaviour in boarding houses through a system of privileges which are valued, especially for the element of trust which is placed in each individual as he is 'promoted'. Sixth-formers volunteer to take on prefect responsibilities, for which they receive training, including in child protection, to enable them to act as sensible 'older brothers' to the younger boys. The report from the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) indicates that all national minimum standards are met, and many are exceeded. The atmosphere in the boarding house is homely and much appreciated by the boarders. Above all, the boarders value the unparalleled opportunities which boarding affords them to play the fullest part in the life of the school.

Mild complaints about refectory suppers for senior boarders were followed up by inspectors, who found that the food available offers ample and healthy provision. One parental concern raised about the security of the junior boarding house was pursued with students, who had no anxieties, understood very well the systems for their own safety, and were confident about using them.

What the school should do to improve further

- Use more innovative methods and styles of teaching to push the boundaries of students' learning even further.
- Monitor teaching and learning rigorously to help teachers understand how best to stimulate students' desire to learn and consolidate their already excellent achievement.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

As a selective school, students' attainment on entry to the school is very high. However, students' achievement throughout the school is excellent, as the school adds further value to their attainment year by year. Moreover, the school's Key Stage 3, GCSE and A-level results have improved almost every year for the last ten years, turning already high standards into exceptional performance.

At the end of Year 9 in 2007, almost every student reached Level 7 in mathematics, and two-thirds reached Level 8. The national expectation is Level 5. Results in science were not far behind. Achievement in English was not quite so good, but still extremely high, indicating students had made significant progress since joining the school.

The proportion of students gaining five or more GCSE passes at grades A* to C (100%) and their average grades far exceed those of the great majority of schools. In 2007, two-thirds of GCSE passes were at grades A* or A. Although there is some variation between subjects, none stands out as being weak within the context of the school. The small number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities do exceptionally well.

At A-level, 50% of the passes were at grade A. Analysis of each individual's results indicates that the great majority of students made better than average progress when compared with students of similar ability, and half of these made exceptional progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. The school has a strong and distinctive ethos which students value and within which the vast majority thrive and develop into well-rounded, thoughtful, enthusiastic individuals. Students' enjoyment of school is evident at every turn and is enhanced significantly by the well-established house system which fosters a clear sense of belonging through an impressive range of extra-curricular activity and competition. The behaviour of students, both in lessons and around the school, is exemplary. Students contribute in many ways to the life and work of the school. The vast majority take a keen interest in lessons, participate avidly in numerous activities and contribute widely to the wider community, for example, through the Combined Cadet Force, participation in musical performance or through charitable work. Students relate very well to one another and feel safe and comfortable within school. Their awareness of issues relating to their own health, safety and well-being is impressive, and the school develops this further through its emphasis on physical activity. Attendance is excellent. Students are extremely well prepared, both academically and socially, for higher education and the world of work.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

In lessons, teaching leads to good learning and often, because of the excellent work ethic of the students, to outstanding learning. The teachers have good subject knowledge and sustain trusting relationships with, and between, students in the classroom. In the best lessons, the teaching is exciting and actively engages students. Clear planning and objectives for lessons, with a variety of activities to stimulate students' imaginations, lead to good or outstanding learning. However, there is an element of less inspiring teaching. Such lessons are not well planned, and teachers tell students what to learn, rather than encouraging them to discover things for themselves. Students have less time, or even no time, to reflect on their learning. Written feedback on work does not consistently tell students clearly enough what they do well and what they need to do to improve.

The school is using its main subject specialisms and its status as a training school well in order to challenge established ways of teaching and to engage all staff in debate as to what constitutes excellent teaching. This debate is enabling the school's teachers to draw on the ideas of other teachers and industrial partners and to increase the proportion of outstanding teaching.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Though largely academic and traditional in style, the school's curriculum meets the needs of its students very well. As befits the specialisms of the school, all students study a technology subject and a modern foreign language for GCSE. Out-of-hours clubs, such as those for Latin, Polish and Mandarin, serve to deepen and broaden pupils' linguistic capability. The sixth-form academic curriculum is enriched with additional activities, such as music appreciation. The extra-curricular programme is particularly strong, displaying richness and variety. It provides a wonderful range of opportunities for students to develop academic, practical, vocational and leisure interests outside the classroom and many students are involved. Many subject-based activities and the availability of the school's virtual learning environment provide additional well-used opportunities for students to extend their learning and contribute to their excellent achievement. International sporting trips are particularly popular with students, and valued by parents. There has been significant improvement in the school's provision for music since the last inspection.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Mutual respect, excellent relationships between staff and students, and a well-run, efficient house system lie at the heart of the school's systems for providing pastoral care and academic guidance for its students. Well-developed partnerships with parents and other agencies also provide a high level of support for learners. The committed staff are very knowledgeable about their students and their needs. The regular dissemination to staff and parents of detailed

information, which the school collates in its well-constructed student database, ensures that any student who is falling behind or at risk is clearly identified. Very good support is then provided through the house system and through skilled and knowledgeable staff. Boarders speak very highly of the care and support provided by boarding staff. Others cannot praise the school highly enough for the way staff have responded and adapted to individual circumstances, providing additional support and enabling them to succeed. Arrangements for the safeguarding of students comply with legal requirements.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The effectiveness of the school's leadership and its management systems is seen in students' outstanding academic achievements, the wonderful ethos which pervades the school, the continual improvements and the very high level of satisfaction on the part of parents and students at what the school has to offer. The school is supported extremely well by its governing body. The financial support provided by the Haberdashers' Company has enabled the school to open a magnificent new science and technology block and make many other improvements to the school's accommodation. The school is acutely aware of the need to improve further the facilities for music and art. Some governors travel long distances to contribute their advice and expertise. They show a keen insight into the school, set challenging targets and are rigorous in holding staff to account for the standards attained.

The school's senior leaders provide very clear direction and are constantly striving for further improvement. Significant strengths in the leadership of the school's specialisms and other subject areas are helping to extend the boundaries of learning and ensuring the maintenance of the very highest standards. Systems to monitor the quality of teaching and learning have developed well since the previous inspection, but some evaluation of the quality of teaching is not rigorous enough, thereby limiting possible areas for development. Nevertheless, the school's track record and the commitment shown by staff, governors and students indicate that there is excellent capacity for making this highly effective school even better.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	1	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	IE ²
The effectiveness of boarding provision	1	
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	IE ²

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	1	
The behaviour of learners	1	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

25 January 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Adams' Grammar School, Newport TF10 7BD

My colleagues and I really enjoyed our visit to your school and came away thinking how fortunate you all are to be educated at such an outstanding school. We know that many of you really appreciate the education you receive and are determined to make the best of the opportunities available to you. Our main findings are:

- standards are exceptionally high throughout the school and the great majority of you are making excellent progress across the board
- you are also making excellent progress in your personal development, displaying maturity, confidence and a lively interest in all that the school provides for you
- your behaviour is exemplary, your enthusiasm infectious and your attendance well above the levels found in most schools
- the quality of teaching is good; some of the teaching is outstanding, but some is rather staid and does not take enough account of your different learning styles
- the school provides a rich and varied curriculum, which is well suited to your levels of ability, and an outstanding range of extra-curricular activities
- staff provide high quality pastoral care, and the well-established house system ensures excellent guidance and support and a careful check on your progress
- the boarding provision is excellent, lending a distinctive character to the school and enabling the boarders amongst you to participate even more fully in school
- the school's leaders have been very successful in providing you with such a high quality education, and they show determination to make it even better still.

All of the above applies to the sixth form as well as the main school. In order to take your learning to new heights, we have asked the staff to seek ways in which they can implement more innovative ways of teaching, taking greater account of your different learning styles. We have asked those who keep a check on what happens in the classroom to be even more rigorous in their evaluation of teaching. You can play your part by making your views known on what works best and by responding with maturity and enthusiasm to the school's efforts to make this great school even better.

Yours sincerely

Mr Graham Sims Lead inspector

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Yours sincerely

Mr Graham Sims
Lead inspector