

Challenger Centre

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	134325
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	328889
Inspection date	14 May 2009
Reporting inspector	Robert Ellis HMI

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 on roll	
School (total)	16
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Headteacher	Jenny Chapman
Date of previous school inspection	2 February 2006
School address	Ufton Lane Sittingbourne ME10 1JB
Telephone number	01795 436936
Fax number	01795 425417

Age group	11–14
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors.

Description of the school

The Challenger Centre offers Key Stage 3 provision for up to 16 pupils from the Swale area who have been excluded or are at risk of exclusion from mainstream schools. Most pupils are White British and many have social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, which make it difficult for them to access education in mainstream schools. Around one in three pupils are eligible for free school meals. Pupils often have a history of a disrupted education prior to attending the centre.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The Challenger Centre provides a satisfactory standard of education and good care for all pupils. Staff are committed to encouraging and enabling the personal development of all pupils. Pupils say that they feel safe and well cared for and that the adults who work with them know them well and give them good support. Parents and carers also speak highly of the support and care that their children are given.

Pupils transfer to the centre with attainment that is generally below the national expectations for their age. They make satisfactory progress and most reach their suitably challenging targets. Progress is most marked in their personal development. Pupils' positive attitudes to learning and the good relationships they develop with adults in the centre are key factors in their success.

Behaviour is mostly good, both in lessons and around the centre. Pupils show that they are developing a respect for others. They show that they have a good understanding of the need to adopt healthy lifestyles and how to keep safe. Teaching is satisfactory overall. Some aspects are good, particularly the sensitive way in which pupils' emotional needs are met. Lessons are generally well structured but teachers do not always plan how long to spend on different activities or match activities precisely to the capabilities of different pupils and, as a result, the pace of lessons often slows and pupils do not make the progress that they might. Most lessons provide good opportunities for pupils to develop their speaking and listening skills. Teachers use questioning well to find out what pupils know and understand. Pupils receive appropriate feedback on how they can improve their work and behaviour and they are encouraged to reflect on their own progress.

Pupils' attendance at the centre is much better than it was when attending their previous schools. A strong focus on developing basic skills ensures that pupils are well prepared for the next steps in their education and later life. They make a positive contribution to their own community. A good range of afternoon activities promote team building and personal development. However, there are not enough opportunities for pupils to engage in performing arts, except circus skills, or to develop a deeper understanding of other faiths and cultures in modern Britain.

The centre is led with clear vision and the headteacher has developed a good collaborative ethos. Arrangements for safeguarding learners are effective and staff ensure that pupils are provided with a safe environment in which to work. The school works well with parents and other agencies such as Connexions to remove barriers to learning. Monitoring of the work of the centre ensures that managers have a reasonable understanding of strengths and weaknesses. Although the centre has considerable information on the performance of individual pupils, it is not held in an accessible way to enable a rapid analysis of overall performance. Consequently, it is difficult to secure a reliable assessment of some aspects of the centre's work that can be used to inform improvement planning.

What the school should do to improve further

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- implement effective systems to assess and record pupils' academic and personal progress, in order to raise standards and evaluate the performance of the unit
- raise the quality of teaching by ensuring that teachers carefully monitor pupils' progress in lessons and use the information to plan work that is matched to each pupil's different capabilities

- build on existing links to enable pupils to contribute to the wider community and develop a better understanding of multicultural Britain.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils start at the unit with below average standards, mostly because of previous interruptions to their education, and emotional and behavioural barriers to learning. Inspection evidence and the centre's own assessment data show that in English, mathematics and science, although academic standards remain below average, achievement is at least satisfactory, and in some cases good. Consequently, most pupils are on track to achieve appropriately challenging targets. Pupils make particularly good progress in relation to their personal development targets. There are no significant differences in the achievement of different groups of pupils. Most pupils are successful in achieving accreditation in unit awards in a variety of subjects, and this helps to develop their self-esteem whilst demonstrating the progress that they make.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils enjoy school and most attend well. Pupils' improving behaviour and positive attitudes to learning makes a strong contribution to their progress. Most pupils show consideration to others and support each other well. However, a very small minority do not show sufficient respect for themselves or others, and indulge in verbal insults and other low-level disruptive behaviour. Behaviour is generally well managed and there are good systems of rewards and sanctions to encourage pupils to take responsibility for their own behaviour. Pupils say that they feel safe and that there are adults to whom they could turn if they have a problem. Pupils have good knowledge about keeping safe and the need to adopt healthy lifestyles. They are well prepared for the next steps in their education and make good progress in developing basic skills. Pupils show increased confidence and an ability to cope with unfamiliar situations. They make a positive contribution to their own community and feel that their views and opinions are valued. The centre rightly recognises that developing links with the wider community is a key priority.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teachers and other adults foster good relationships with the pupils and know them well. Classes are generally managed effectively and most lessons have a calm and purposeful atmosphere. Questioning is used well to assess what pupils have understood, and teachers value pupils' contributions. However, planning does not always identify the small steps in learning that are necessary to reach the learning objective. Also, time is not always used to greatest advantage and, because planning often does not indicate how long should be spent on a particular activity, the pace of the lesson sometimes slows and pupils do not achieve as much as they might. In the best planning, teachers make explicit reference to pupils' individual targets and have precise learning objectives.

Pupils' enjoyment of lessons is evident but some pupils are so keen to respond when questions are asked that they do not reflect sufficiently before offering a response. Pupils who have particular learning needs are supported well. Praise and encouragement are used to develop pupils' confidence and teachers make sure that pupils who have a short attention span are kept engaged by a good range of interesting and exciting classroom activities.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The innovative curriculum is, in most respects, well matched to pupils' needs and interests. Pupils particularly like the curriculum enrichment activities which take place each afternoon; these include cookery, art, swimming and skiing. There is a strong focus on activities which foster positive relationships and which improve pupils' emotional and social well-being. A comprehensive programme of literacy, numeracy, information and communication technology, science and personal, social and health education activities underpin the work of the centre. Opportunities for pupils to develop an interest in the performing arts are more limited. The curriculum is enhanced by a residential expedition to Wales, which offers a range of challenging activities and opportunities for team building and the development of social skills.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Excellent care is reflected in the high level of commitment demonstrated by staff to facilitate pupils' enjoyment and achievement and promote their health and well-being. Child protection procedures are robust and effective. Good productive partnerships exist with other schools and outside agencies, such as the school nurse and child and adolescent mental health services, to support pupils' learning and development and to facilitate successful reintegration into mainstream schooling. Parents and carers feel well informed about the progress that pupils make and value the care and support that pupils receive. Pupils have suitably challenging academic and behavioural targets and most pupils have a clear understanding of what they need to do to achieve their targets.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher provides clear direction and leads a cohesive team who share a common sense of purpose. Staff meetings at the start and end of each day ensure that all staff are well informed about the progress and difficulties of individual pupils. Although some pupils arrive at the centre with very little information about their prior academic performance, the centre has established a secure baseline from which progress can be measured, and holds a wide range of information about pupils' academic and personal development. However, this data is held in a variety of forms in different places, which makes analysis of the information a time-consuming and challenging process. Consequently, self-evaluation is not securely based on accurate analysis of all of the available performance data and, as a result, some judgements are overgenerous. Some staff seem unclear about their exact roles and responsibilities. Classroom observation is used to monitor the quality of teaching and learning and teachers are provided with appropriate feedback on the strengths and areas for development. The management committee support the centre well and members are developing their roles so that they are now better able to challenge and act effectively as 'critical friends'. Satisfactory progress has been made in

addressing the areas for improvement identified by last inspection and the centre has demonstrated a capacity for further improvement.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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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?	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

15 May 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Challenger Centre, Sittingbourne ME10 1JB Thank you for contributing to the inspection of your centre, and a particular thank- you to the pupils who took time to speak to me and tell me about the centre and your work. This letter provides a brief summary of my findings but I hope you will take time to read the full report, which is published on the Ofsted website at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

The Challenger Centre provides you with a satisfactory standard of education and good care. You said that you feel safe and know whom to turn to if you have a problem. I saw that you develop good relationships with the adults that you work with and that you enjoy learning. Your attendance is much better than it was in your previous schools and you are making steady progress in your work. Most of you behave very well and you are developing the skills that you will need for the next steps in your education. You said how much you liked the afternoon activities and I saw many photographs of you taking part in challenging activities.

Some improvements need to be made and these are listed below.

- Information about the work of the centre and your achievements needs to be recorded more efficiently so that it is easier for staff to quickly check on the progress that you are making and identify what improvements need to be made.
- Teachers need to make sure that they use assessment information to plan work that is work is matched closely to your different abilities.
- You need to work more with your local community and have better opportunities to learn about what other people in multicultural modern Britain believe and how they live.

The adults responsible for running the centre have some good ideas about how it can be even better and you can play your part by working with them and always doing your best.

Yours faithfully

Robert Ellis Her Majesty's Inspector