

Swanwick Hall School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	112930
Local Authority	Derbyshire
Inspection number	357225
Inspection dates	3–4 November 2010
Reporting inspector	Brian Cartwright HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1252
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	229
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Marina Fournier-Farmer
Headteacher	Jonathan Fawcett
Date of previous school inspection	11 February 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. Inspectors observed 48 lessons of 47 teachers and one support assistant, and met with students, staff and governors. They observed the school's work, and looked at the school's records of progress, policies and minutes of governing body meetings. The team analysed questionnaires from staff and students, and 228 parental questionnaires.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following.

The learning and progress that students of all abilities are making in each of their areas of study.

- The extent to which day-to-day teaching matches the learning needs of students, challenges their talents and motivates their interest.
- The reasons behind the average progress shown by data from the sixth form.
- The quality of the curriculum, the impact of the specialist technology college status, and the effectiveness of wider partnerships with other providers.

Information about the school

Swanwick Hall School is larger than most secondary schools. It has a low proportion of students from minority heritage backgrounds, and a low proportion of students for whom English is an additional language. The proportion of students with special education needs and/or disabilities is average. The school is a specialist Technology College, and a Training School. Students attend from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds.

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?**2****The school's capacity for sustained improvement****2**

Main findings

Swanwick Hall school does well for its students, thanks to a strong sense of common purpose amongst staff to deliver the best opportunities they can for students. The school's original motto; 'stand sure' is modeled by staff, making Swanwick Hall a place of safety, support, good learning and successful preparation for adult life. That unity and commitment is a testimony to the effective, good humoured and persuasive ambition of the headteacher, shared by his leadership colleagues, to relentlessly raise standards. Staff mirror that ambition and good humour in their leadership of learning, making the working ethos for students enjoyable as well as educational. They manage this despite some accommodation that is drab and barely fit for purpose. Students, and their parents, recognise that the key strength of the school is positive and approachable staff. The school manages the health and safety of students and staff exceptionally well, including appropriate procedures for dealing with the split-site settings across a busy road, and complex building layout. Students know how to stay safe themselves, and the quality and frequency of safeguarding training is exemplary.

Examination results are rising more quickly than the national rate, and are set to rise further for the current Year 11. The majority of confirmed progress measures for students are above average at Key Stage 4, but not yet for all sixth formers. The quality of teaching and learning in the majority of lessons is good, and in the rest of them is sound enough for students to be making at least the expected progress. Inspectors noted that good learning occurred where students spent time individually thinking, or discussing ideas in pairs or small groups, or engaging in robust debate with teachers. Such episodes were invariably well planned to meet the different abilities and prior understanding of students. A minority of lessons did not fully engage every student, and did not give them enough time to work independently. Inspectors consider that this is one reason why A-level academic sixth form learning is satisfactory, rather than good. Marking is often done very well, with accurate and detailed indications to students on the strengths of their work, and of what they should do to improve it. But this practice, although common, is not yet universal. Students are not yet in the habit of acting directly upon that advice.

These reservations aside, it is important to note how strongly the school is improving its performance, including in the sixth form as standards here are also rising. The good curriculum, and good transition from primary school is effectively enhanced through specialist status. Overall attendance is improving from below average to average, incidences of serious misbehaviour reducing to lower proportions than nationally. Good preparation ensures all students move into education, employment or training at 16. Self-evaluation is rigorous and accurate and the school continues to demonstrate a good capacity for further improvement.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning in satisfactory lessons by consistently:
 - ensuring all students are individually and actively involved in all elements of lessons, though discussion, debate, written and practical work
 - using the good performance and tracking data available to staff to assign tasks that match the learning needs and challenge the interests of individual students according to each of their abilities and prior knowledge.
- Consistently apply the best assessment practice evident already in many lessons so that students:
 - know the quality of the work they have completed
 - know what they need to do to improve it further
 - act upon that advice promptly.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Students in the main school achieve well. In all subjects, attainment is rising, indicative of a broad and inclusive curriculum that gives every learner success. Recent substantial improvements in mathematics provision has closed the gap to English, ensuring students are reaching average standards in these key subjects from a slightly lower than average starting point on entry to the school. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make as good progress as their peers. In the majority of lessons across all areas of study, progress is good because all students of all abilities and needs fully participate in the activities. Teachers work very hard to enthuse and captivate students' inquisitiveness, usually successfully. Students respond well to teachers, trying their best even when on occasions the task lacks challenge or interest. However, students are not routinely responding directly to teachers' marking, for example, by correcting the work, completing it when asked, or answering a specific personalised question.

The students' inherently good behaviour helps to maintain a calm and good-humoured working ethos; it is particularly noticeable to visitors, who see young people enjoying school life. Attendance is improving, even amongst the few students who are persistently absent. There are rare occasions of indiscipline, but the school almost always resolves these quickly, to the satisfaction of the parties concerned. Students emphasised that they felt very safe, and know how to deal with any worries they may have thanks to good support and guidance from staff. Students treat one another well. They make newcomers to the school, from all kinds of backgrounds and circumstances, very welcome.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

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

How effective is the provision?

In the majority of lessons, teaching and learning are good. In these lessons, clear objectives are based on an accurate knowledge of students' prior learning and tasks are carefully matched to planned learning outcomes. Imaginative and varied activities help to engage and enthuse students and maintain their interest. Teachers' skillful questioning and precise explanations help students to deepen their understanding and give fuller, more considered answers. Sometimes, planning does not fully take account of students' differing needs. In some cases, teachers talk too much and give unnecessarily lengthy explanations so that students' interest wanes.

The good curriculum has several outstanding features, linked to the school's technology specialism. It is central to very good links with primary schools, with school secondary specialist staff making regular visits, particularly to those schools operating in disadvantaged settings. Technology is a successful faculty and generates additional motivation through a rich variety of clubs, competitions and activities. Some Key Stage 3 students are already gaining level 1 Technology qualifications. A good network of local 14-19 providers ensures students have full access to diplomas and other vocational courses, and extends to ensuring the 6th form curriculum provision is also good. There are dozens of extracurricular activities that the majority of students take up. The novel 'stop the clock' days address key elements of personal, social and health education well. However, planned day-to-day opportunities for students to reflect upon issues are limited by time.

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There is no systematic audit of where those moments might be guaranteed for all students across the curriculum. There are good international contacts, with European trips, African and Chilean charity partnerships.

Good care, guidance and support is rooted in the consistently good care by all staff for each student, which in turn is driving a strong sense of loyalty to the school from students. The re-aligning of accountability for students' learning and progress through middle managers is resulting in good tracking of student progress and swift identification of any barriers to learning. There is effective response by specialist teachers or, as necessary, external professional agencies to tackle underachievement. The school operates a number of effective in-house support services for students finding learning challenging, be that short or long term help. This works without significant disruption to the curriculum of these students.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
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	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Continuously improving outcomes for students confirms the effectiveness of leaders and managers at all levels. Notable improvements amongst middle leadership, driven by the headteacher, have ensured better consistency between faculties. The universal willingness of all staff to discuss and develop their teaching based on feedback from lesson observations is one indicator of the embedded commitment to improve. School managers know strengths and weaknesses well, and respond purposefully to shortfalls, for example in steps taken to improve the quality of mathematics provision. A strong collegiate feature is the involvement of support staff, including administrative and technical colleagues, in the tutorial provision of the school. This is cementing an effective 'one staff' inclusive working ethos.

Despite the disappointment of leaders and school students in planning for the cancelled Building Schools for the Future (BSF) project, the current learning environment is generally satisfactory. But without the sterling efforts by site management staff, and imaginative display work organised by teachers and support staff, the drab and decaying nature of much of the accommodation would be more apparent. Procedures for ensuring the health and safety of young people and adults are robust and adapted exceptionally well to the setting. On the rare occasions where safety-related concerns have arisen, thorough review, that includes external expertise and advice, ensures leaders and managers learn from the incident and adapt procedures if necessary. Staff and students are alert to risk, and know how to pass any worries they may have to those in charge.

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Governors have their fingers on the pulse of the school, with numerous connections at all levels that help them effectively triangulate day-to-day reality of school life with the formal reporting of school performance via the senior leadership team. A good audit of local community needs has highlighted strengths in the school provision to tackle socio-economic disparities, but also the limited local opportunity to develop regular links between its students and those from different cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds. The school is therefore planning to promote engagement with such groups beyond the immediate area. The impact of its equalities policy is effectively evaluated by governors through stakeholder surveys; the performance of different groups of students are carefully tracked and all of them achieve equally well.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Sixth form

Students study a wide range of courses, including a number of successful applied A-level subjects, and vocational studies, but the predominant programmes are AS, then A level academic study. Almost every student completes their course, with around 70% continuing into higher education. The attainment of students on completion was lower than the national mean, but has been rising over time and is now close enough to that benchmark to be considered broadly average. Compared with a range of national progress measures, students in the A level programmes have been achieving expected grades, given their starting points, but no better. This represents satisfactory progress, compared with the good progress younger students make in main school.

Curriculum provision is good, as is care, guidance and support, with students speaking passionately about the positive attentions and friendly approach of all staff; it is a major reason why they continue studies in this sixth form, and join it from other settings. The school's sixth form leaders have recognised achievement could be better. They have

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identified possible barriers to learning connected with the demands for private research and study that A-levels require, as well as the need for more consistently good teaching. There is now explicit training of study skills, and administrative support to help students stay up to date with coursework and homework demands. Changes are in place to help better match students' entry criteria to specific courses, rather than a generalised standard offer. The elements of teaching that are satisfactory, rather than good, are having their most obvious effect at A level, because here it is critical that students themselves take a major role in their own learning, through debate, argument, discussion, independent learning and active group work.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	3
The quality of provision in the sixth form	3
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

Views of parents and carers

The vast majority of parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire think that this is a good school, that is successful in ensuring their children learn well, enjoy school life, and succeed in their next steps. Many parents or carers noted the approachable and friendly staff, the effectiveness of transition arrangements for new Year 7 pupils, and their pleasure in knowing their children enjoy school. One or two did not agree that every aspect was good, but inspectors checked out potentially serious concerns and found the school had done all it could to resolve disagreement.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Swanwick Hall School 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 inspection team received 228 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1252 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	90	39	126	55	6	3	2	1
The school keeps my child safe	75	33	141	62	5	2	1	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	80	35	128	56	10	4	1	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	69	30	130	57	16	7	2	1
The teaching is good at this school	66	29	134	59	11	5	1	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	60	26	141	62	13	6	3	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	47	21	156	68	12	5	1	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)	84	37	117	51	10	4	2	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	68	30	139	61	9	4	2	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	60	26	123	54	12	5	10	4
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	42	18	135	59	19	8	4	2
The school is led and managed effectively	72	32	132	58	9	4	4	2
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	96	42	113	50	9	4	3	1

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

	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
Type of school	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

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 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 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. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

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.



5 November 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Swanwick Hall School, Alfreton, DE55 1AE

Thank you for all the contributions many of you made to this inspection. Your good humour, lively conversation and enthusiasm helped us confirm that Swanwick Hall is a good and improving school. You are fortunate in participating in a school that is exceptionally good at ensuring you will be successful in finding further education, training or employment. It does this because all the staff contribute to the headteacher's persistent drive for higher standards, and do so in a very friendly and supportive way that you told us you appreciated. All through the main school, students make better than expected progress. Sixth formers are making sound progress. Sixth form standards are also rising, however, and the school has introduced better ways to help sixth formers with homework and coursework demands.

Teachers know you well and this is because of the good care, guidance and support they provide along with committed support staff. There are elements of provision that could be even better, connected with teaching and learning. We have asked teachers to be more consistent in using their knowledge of your abilities to tailor lesson activities to what you already know and can do. Sometimes, they could give more lesson time for all of you to talk, think, write, debate and argue points, or conduct more experimental and practical work, rather than talk at length to the entire class. Most of the work you do is marked well and usually includes comments on how you should improve your work. But we did not see many examples of you as students responding to that advice to, for example, complete a question, or correct mistakes. We would like you to do this more often.

Best wishes for your future

Yours sincerely

Brian Cartwright

Her Majesty's Inspector

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