

Swanmead Community School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123875
Local Authority	Somerset
Inspection number	359537
Inspection dates	2–3 February 2011
Reporting inspector	Robert Pyner HMI

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

Type of school	Middle deemed secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	9–13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	313
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Nigel Corbett
Headteacher	Sheila Bowker
Date of previous school inspection	8 July 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 21 lessons and observed 16 teachers. They held meetings with senior leaders, the chair of governing body, staff and groups of pupils. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at progress tracking and performance data, the school improvement plan, minutes from the governing body, pupils' work and numerous policies, guidelines, plans and reviews. The questionnaire responses from 135 parents, 98 pupils and 29 staff were also analysed.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas:

- how well different groups of pupils achieve and, in particular, high and middle ability learners and those with learning difficulties
- the extent to which teaching and learning challenge and support learners and improve the achievement of all pupils, particularly in mathematics
- the effectiveness of the governing body, senior and middle leaders in bringing about improvement.

Information about the school

Swanmead is smaller than the average-sized 9♦13 middle school and serves the town of Ilminster and surrounding area. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is lower than average. The proportion from ethnic minority groups is well below average, as is the percentage for whom English is an additional language. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average; their needs include physical disabilities and moderate learning difficulties. The percentage with a statement of special educational needs is well below the national figure. The school has been led by an acting headteacher since April 2009 and the process is underway to appoint a permanent post-holder who will join the school in September 2011. The school has gained the International School, Investor in People, Enterprise, Healthy School and Sportsmark awards.

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

Swanmead Community School provides a satisfactory standard of education. The acting headteacher has worked with determination through a period of change to continue the development of the school with a focus on raising achievement. This is beginning to show an impact on attainment, particularly for Year 5 and 6 pupils and in mathematics.

The school is rightly proud of its work to develop a learning community based on care for the individual. Its ethos is inclusive, supporting the needs of potentially vulnerable pupils well. Pupils and their parents and carers appreciate the work of the staff to create a safe environment and strong support systems mean that attendance is high in comparison with national figures. As a result, the overall care, guidance and support provided for pupils are effective.

All groups of pupils achieve satisfactorily. Standards over time for Year 8 pupils have been broadly average but attainment for those in Year 6 has been weaker and in mathematics significantly below average. The subject coordinators for English and mathematics, led by the acting headteacher, have worked well to forge an effective partnership with the school which transfers the largest proportion of pupils to Swanmead and have developed systems to monitor progress made by pupils prior to transition at Year 5. Furthermore, staff have built on the information to develop appropriate intervention strategies after transfer. As confirmed by inspection evidence, these strategies are beginning to have an impact on the attainment and progress for the current pupils in Year 5 and 6, but are still at an early stage and have not yet led to a consistent pattern of improvement. However, taking into consideration achievement over their whole time at the school, pupils make satisfactory progress overall, including those with learning disabilities and/or disabilities.

Pupils are proud of their school. They are polite and friendly and behave well. They discuss their work readily and generally have clear views about the support they receive and their positive experience of school. They told inspectors that they enjoy school and know staff care for them and will help them if they have problems or concerns.

The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall, but variable in quality across the school. There are some models of very effective teaching, but in other lessons the lack of pace and challenging activities matched to pupils' needs means that progress slows. Marking is also of variable quality. Inspectors did find a few examples which provided pupils with a clear idea of how well they were doing, but there was limited evidence of marking which gave pupils specific advice on what they needed to do to improve. The school provides a satisfactory range of curriculum opportunities, with some good elements, for example, the breadth of extra-curricular activities. Senior leaders are currently reviewing teaching and learning for the younger pupils to improve cohesion and continuity in learning as part of the drive to improve achievement.

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The school has worked purposefully to put itself in a position to accelerate development across all aspects of its work and therefore has satisfactory capacity to improve. This is because the acting headteacher, leaders and the governing body are determined to improve the achievement of all pupils, self-evaluation demonstrates a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and monitoring systems are developing as an improvement driver.

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?

- Raise attainment and improve rates of progress in English and mathematics by
 - developing the current systems for tracking pupils' progress and intervening swiftly and vigorously so that all ability groups make greater- than-expected progress
 - reinforcing systems for review and analysis, including of teaching, by the coordinators for English and mathematics so that teachers of all subjects are accountable for pupils' progress in these subjects
 - at each full governing body meeting, reporting on the analysis of the progress made by pupils in English and mathematics across the school, so that governors can hold senior leaders to account in a regular and systematic way.
- Increase the proportion of good or better teaching to at least 80% by July 2011 by ensuring that teachers consistently:
 - use assessment information more effectively in classes set by ability to plan challenging lessons that take account of prior attainment and the learning needs of individuals and groups
 - use teaching methods that provide pace, variety, interest and high levels of challenge to accelerate pupils' progress
 - ensure that marking is regular and engages pupils so that they know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve.
- Complete the review of the teaching and learning for younger pupils and implement the outcomes swiftly to improve attainment and progress.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Pupils are keen to do well and, when they are motivated by activities which meet their needs and challenge them to think, make clear progress. Generally, they ask questions when they do not understand and have positive attitudes to learning. However, not all lessons stretch the pupils or are well matched to needs, even in classes set by ability, and as a result progress is slower than it could be. Nevertheless, the progress made by most pupils over their time at the school is satisfactory overall, although stronger for lower- and middle- than for higher-ability groups. The newly refined system for tracking pupils' progress is more accessible to teachers, although its use is still too inconsistent to be fully effective. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities also make satisfactory progress and the school is developing an enhanced tracking system for these pupils.

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Most pupils respond thoughtfully to adults and other learners in lessons and demonstrate good attitudes to learning and behaviour. Discussions with them show that they generally enjoy their lessons and appreciate the good relations found within the school. Pupils appreciate the opportunities to play a part in the organisation of the school, for example, consideration by the school council led to the provision of new lockers in cloakrooms. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Elements of workplace place skills are developed well, such as team work, use of information and communication technology and opportunities for enterprise initiatives, but weaker literacy and numeracy skills mean that this aspect is satisfactory overall.

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	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	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	1
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 effective lessons, teachers' secure subject knowledge, good pace and supportive relationships ensure a variety of approaches are used well. Activities may include paired and group work where pupils can discuss and develop their skills, for example in a PE lesson for Year 8 pupils observed by inspectors where they were learning volleyball skills. Where teachers are less effective, they do not provide sufficient pace and challenge for pupils, often pitching lessons at just one level, as was observed in some mathematics lessons. There are clear systems for tracking pupils' progress, but this information is not used sharply enough to ensure activities are differentiated, challenging and well matched

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to need in lessons and especially those set by ability, particularly for higher-attaining groups.

The curriculum meets the needs of the pupils adequately and has some good elements. For example, the broad range of extra-curricular activities, including opportunities in sport, music and projects with the town council such as the safety forum, support pupils' good personal development. However, opportunities to develop improvements in literacy are missed, such as in the absence of focused teacher-support during reading time as part of tutor groups. The school is rightly reviewing its teaching and learning for the younger pupils in order to meet their learning needs more effectively.

The pupils receive good care and key aspects of personal guidance and support are strengths of the school. The work of the primary class is effective in supporting pupils in Year 5 and 6 who need the security of a single class and teacher and, as a result, they make clear progress in their literacy and numeracy skills as well as improving their self-esteem. The Helping Understanding Behaviour provision supports potentially vulnerable pupils and has improved behaviour, relationships and attendance. Effective partnership work with feeder schools has developed transition arrangements well.

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	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher has a calm approach and is determined to improve provision and outcomes for pupils; this was recognised in the monitoring inspection last summer. Staff appreciate the opportunities they have for their professional development and ability to shape the strategic direction of the school. She has been successful in developing the roles of the coordinators for English and mathematics, although this is currently less developed for the latter subject. Nevertheless, improvements resulting from partnerships established with feeder schools and other middle schools show an impact on the achievement by younger pupils and have potential to develop this further. The chair of the governing body is very experienced, with a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school, and governors are using this knowledge effectively in the current recruitment process for a new headteacher. Members of the governing body visit the school regularly and have established links with subject coordinators, but reports on the achievement made by pupils are not sufficiently regular to hold leaders to account effectively.

The procedures to ensure the safeguarding of pupils are good. Policies, procedures and training are subject to regular review to ensure effective compliance with regulations. The school meets its duties to promote equality and tackle discrimination well and is a strong

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inclusive community. There are well-developed opportunities for pupils to contribute to the community in Ilminster. However, although there are strong links with a partner school in Zambia, plans to promote engagement with a community within a contrasting area in Britain are not yet firmly in place.

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	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
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

A greater-than-average proportion of parents and carers responded to the questionnaire. Most are happy with their children's experience at the school. Responses show that they feel strongly that their children enjoy school and are safe and cared for, that they are informed about their children's progress and that teaching is good. Most parents and carers also feel that the leadership and management of the school are effective. A small minority believe that the school is less effective in dealing with unacceptable behaviour, helping them to support their children's learning and supporting pupils to develop a healthy lifestyle. A few felt that their children could make more progress. A significant proportion of parents and carers did not respond to the statement regarding the school taking account of their suggestions and concerns, and this distorted the result for this item. A few responded negatively. The school has evidence of regular surveys of parents and carers and action taken. During this inspection the team found that there was an effective range of provision to support pupils' understanding of healthy lifestyles, behaviour was good and that the school provides a satisfactory range of strategies to support parents and carers in helping their children to learn. Overall across the school, the progress made by pupils is satisfactory but should be greater, particularly in Years 5 and 6.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Swanmead Community 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 135 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 313 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	36	31	64	55	15	13	1	1
The school keeps my child safe	30	26	72	62	7	6	5	4
My school informs me about my child's progress	31	27	62	53	19	16	4	3
My child is making enough progress at this school	32	28	61	53	18	16	4	3
The teaching is good at this school	27	23	71	61	12	10	4	3
The school helps me to support my child's learning	18	16	68	59	21	18	4	3
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	19	16	66	57	19	16	5	4
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)	24	21	71	61	9	8	1	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	25	22	68	59	14	12	2	2
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	20	17	63	54	19	16	8	7
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	20	17	57	49	21	18	1	1
The school is led and managed effectively	25	22	68	59	12	10	4	3
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	35	30	57	49	15	13	7	6

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	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

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 August 2010 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 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.

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.



4 February 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Swanmead Community School, Ilminster TA19 0BL

Thank you for making the inspection team so welcome when we inspected your school recently. Special thanks go to the pupils who spoke to us and to those of you who completed the questionnaire; we found this very useful. We enjoyed talking to you and found what you had to say very informative and relevant. This letter is to tell you about our findings.

Swanmead Community School provides a satisfactory standard of education. We were impressed by your good behaviour and the quality of your relationships with adults and other pupils. Your attainment at the end of Year 8 is broadly average; the progress you make is also satisfactory, but could be greater, particularly in English and mathematics in Years 5 and 6. You are cared for and supported well and you told inspectors that you appreciate this. Teaching is satisfactory overall, with some that is good and some that is excellent. Your teachers provide you with a curriculum that meets your interests and needs and you told us that you enjoy particularly the range of clubs and activities offered out of school time.

The acting headteacher, senior staff and the governing body provide clear leadership. They recognise that there are always areas for improvement, and we have asked them to:

- increase the progress that you make in your learning, particularly in English and mathematics
- improve all teaching to match that of the best at the school
- complete the review of the way that the younger pupils are taught in order to provide you with the most effective teaching and learning so you can achieve your best.

You also have an important part to play by continuing to work hard, making the most of the range of opportunities you have at school and continuing your high level of attendance. We are sure that you will and wish you well for the future.

Yours sincerely

Robert Pyner

Her Majesty's Inspector (on behalf of the inspection team)

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