

Swanmead Community School

Ditton Street, Ilminster, Somerset, TA19 0BL

Inspection dates 19–20 September 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Pupils do not achieve well enough, especially in Years 5 and 6; their progress in reading is especially slow.
- Pupils' skills in reading, writing and speaking and listening are gradually improving but are not planned for in enough detail in different subjects by teachers and leaders; this limits how quickly pupils can improve.
- The quality of teaching varies too much across the school.
- In too many lessons, teachers talk for too long and pupils are not pushed hard enough to think and work on their own.
- Leadership and management are not yet good because achievement and teaching, whilst improving steadily, are not yet good.
- Some leaders and managers who are responsible for subjects do not yet have the necessary skills and experience to improve teaching and achievement in their areas of responsibility consistently.
- School leaders and the governing body are not able to check in enough detail how well the school is performing because the means to measure its progress are not specific enough.

The school has the following strengths

- Pupils show respect for staff and get on well with each other. Almost all pupils are keen to learn and do well.
- Parents, staff and pupils agree that behaviour and safety are consistently good.
- Attendance is consistently high.
- The headteacher has put clear and well thought through plans in place to help the school to improve; staff and parents feel that the school is improving and there is evidence of improvement.

Information about this inspection

- During the inspection, 20 whole or part-lessons were observed.
- Meetings were held with: senior leaders, including the headteacher; middle leaders; members of the governing body, including the Chair; two groups of pupils, one from each key stage.
- Inspectors looked at: planning and self-evaluation documentation; assessment information; examples of pupils' work; and, a range of policy documents.
- There were 17 parent responses to Parent View. In addition, the school's analysis of the views of parents from a survey undertaken in March 2012 was also considered, together with Ofsted questionnaires completed by 24 school staff.

Inspection team

Ken Bush, Lead inspector	Additional inspector
Margaret Faull	Additional inspector
David King	Additional inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Swanmead is a smaller-than-average-sized middle deemed secondary school.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs supported through school action is broadly average, while the proportion supported through school action plus or with statements of special educational needs is well below average.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium is well below the national average.
- The school works in partnership with a Local Leader of Education who is also headteacher of the adjacent first school; between 80% and 90% of each cohort at Swanmead typically transfers from the first school.
- The school meets the current floor standards.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching to good by:
 - increasing the level of challenge for all pupils, particularly, but not exclusively for the more able, by better use of assessment information
 - reducing the amount of 'teacher talk' to enable pupils to be more independent in their learning
 - ensuring that marking helps pupils to know how to improve more consistently.
- Improve achievement to good by:
 - increasing rates of progress in Key Stage 2, particularly in reading
 - ensuring that pupils' acquisition and development of literacy skills occur more rapidly and securely in a range of subjects.
- Improve leadership and management to good by:
 - putting a sharper focus on outcomes in self-evaluation so that all leaders and managers are better able to check school performance in detail
 - increasing the effectiveness of the governing body in holding the school to account through the use of sharper self-evaluation
 - increasing the capacity of middle leaders to raise standards in their areas of responsibility.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- From starting points which are close to age-related expectations, pupils' attainment in English and mathematics by the end of Key Stage 2 is broadly average. Until recently, rates of progress in Years 5 and 6 were too slow; inspection evidence shows that this is now beginning to improve.
- Rates of progress in Years 7 and 8 are typically more rapid than in Key Stage 2, including in reading, although there is considerable variability in different cohorts. Across the four years in which pupils attend Swanmead, rates of progress are not yet typically good, but are on a clear trend of improvement since the previous inspection.
- Reflecting the school's commitment to ensuring that all pupils enjoy equality of opportunity, disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make progress at least at similar rates to their peers in school and, in some cases, better; this applies also to pupils for whom the school receives the pupil premium.
- With minor variation year on year, boys and girls progress at broadly comparable rates. More able pupils over time have achieved relatively less well than their peers, although this improved in Year 6 in 2012, especially in English. Inspection evidence indicates that the degree of challenge for more able pupils is starting to improve but is not yet consistent across all classes, year groups and subjects.
- Pupils' numeracy skills are now beginning to develop more quickly than in previous years as a result of teachers' better understanding of mathematical concepts.
- Overall, pupils acquire and develop their literacy skills with increasing confidence and no specific group of pupils gets left behind. In particular, examples of improvements in writing and in speaking and listening skills were seen during the inspection. However, because the quality of planning of literacy development across subjects is not tightly coordinated, there are inconsistencies in how well pupils in different classes can use basic skills, including spelling, punctuation and grammar.
- Progress in reading is slower than in writing, in part because insufficient demands are made on pupils in lessons when teachers read to pupils who are capable of doing it for themselves. During the inspection, weaker readers in all year groups were generally able to decode words in texts with little difficulty but were less secure in their comprehension skills.
- Some increased use of phonics (letters and sounds) in Key Stage 2 teaching is beginning to accelerate reading skills for low attaining readers, but progress in this area is at a relatively early stage.
- The current improvement strategy for reading includes more daily reading practice and an extension in the range of reading resources, notably to provide more suitable material for the needs and interests of boys. The impact of this work is emerging, but is not yet promoting good achievement.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- There are clear indications that teaching has improved since the previous inspection. However, it is not yet good because there is too much variability in quality across classes, year groups and subjects.
- There is clearly some effective practice in most areas of the school, despite the lack of consistency over time. In the most successful lessons, teachers use secure subject knowledge to plan lessons which engage the majority of pupils, build upon what they already know, understand and can do and provide useful feedback to help them move forward in their learning. In these lessons, sound knowledge of pupils' starting points enables teachers to use questioning skilfully to stimulate pupils' thinking.
- In a Year 8 art lesson seen during the inspection, low ability pupils were able to discuss their

progress in mask making with confidence and exercise impressive levels of independence in their skill development. The teaching assistant in this lesson was adept at ensuring that support for the pupil to whom she had been assigned enabled independence, rather than over reliance upon her.

- However, this example of high quality teaching is not yet typical. In too many lessons, assessment information is not yet used well enough in planning to meet the needs of all individuals, resulting in insufficient challenge. Consequently, expectations are not consistently high enough, including, but not exclusively, for more able pupils. In too many lessons, there is a tendency for teachers to talk for too long or over explain and not give pupils the opportunity to work ideas through for themselves and to think and work independently.
- The use of teaching assistants to support learning is also variable. Whilst they generally provide useful support in enabling most disabled pupils and those with special educational needs to access the curriculum and make progress broadly in line with their peers, their role in promoting high levels of challenge is more limited.
- Some marking is effective and provides useful feedback to pupils about how they can improve. However, as for teaching taken as a whole, it is too variable in quality with insufficient specific pointers about next steps and limited reference to specific assessment criteria as shown in National Curriculum levels.
- As a consequence of this lack of consistency, neither teaching nor achievement, whilst both improving, are good.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Pupils behave well in lessons and around the school generally. They are keen to learn and to do well at school as reflected in consistently high rates of attendance.
- School records show that incidents of serious misbehaviour are very uncommon and there has been very limited use of exclusion from the school as a sanction. Pupils confirm through discussion that the positive picture of behaviour seen by inspectors is typical of what occurs over time. Inspection evidence indicates that all forms of bullying are rare and when they do occur are dealt with fairly and expediently by staff. Pupils express high levels of confidence that the school is a safe environment. They are able to cite examples of how the school has helped them to be safety conscious outside of school by raising awareness of issues such as cyber bullying.
- Pupils also affirm strongly that behaviour has improved significantly under the leadership of the current headteacher. They feel that the expectations regarding what is acceptable behaviour and the sanctions that operate when these are transgressed are now much clearer and are interpreted fairly by the vast majority of staff.
- Behaviour and safety are judged to be good rather than outstanding because:
 - records show that there is a very small proportion of repeat offenders for the same misdemeanour
 - a few parents and a very small proportion of staff express some minor reservations about how well behaviour is managed.

The leadership and management require improvement

- The current headteacher has galvanised the school's approach to securing sustained improvement since taking up post a year ago. A number of key changes to leadership roles and governing body committee structures have been implemented to raise expectations and to increase accountability at all levels.
- Indications that these changes are beginning to work are emerging, but it is too early to see evidence of strong impact; consequently, whilst achievement and teaching are both improving, neither is yet good.
- Detailed plans for sustained improvement are well focused and inclusive in approach, involving

a wide range of stakeholders. Staff morale is high and there is widespread affirmation that there is a clear and attainable vision for the future.

- Senior leaders now have a clear brief to secure improvements across the school (rather than within key stages) and are undertaking their revised monitoring roles with increasing confidence and success. This is evident in the much improved processes for tracking pupil progress and the involvement of classroom teachers through pupil progress meetings.
- Middle leader roles have been extensively overhauled to increase postholders' accountability for standards in their areas of responsibility. The impact of this is at a very early stage, including regarding the leadership of core subjects.
- Self-evaluation is broadly accurate, although the criteria for measuring success (as demonstrated in the school improvement plan) are not sufficiently focused on outcomes, but rather too much on provision. This is currently a barrier to assisting the governing body in its monitoring and evaluation function and to assisting school leaders in checking performance in detail.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced and meets pupils' needs in most respects, including through its promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. However, it is not yet good as the pace of pupils' development of literacy skills is hampered by a lack of coordination in delivery across the school.
- The local authority has made a useful contribution to school improvement, notably through its brokering of support from a Local Leader of Education. This has enabled an innovative partnership approach to the task of promoting improved standards in achievement and teaching in Key Stage 2; signs of early impact are embryonic.
- School leaders and managers clearly demonstrate the capacity to improve. Improving the quality of teaching is the key priority and inspection evidence shows that there has been steady progress in this area since the previous inspection.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body discharges its statutory duties effectively, ensuring all current safeguarding requirements are met and that equality of opportunity is securely promoted.
 - The governing body has overseen performance management arrangements adequately, including those for the headteacher.
 - The governing body contributes to self-evaluation adequately and since the previous inspection has begun to improve its effectiveness in holding school leaders to account.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	123875
Local authority	Somerset
Inspection number	406200

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	275
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Colin Horne
Headteacher	Mark Walker
Date of previous school inspection	2–3 February 2011
Telephone number	01460 52431
Fax number	01460 55305
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