



Swanshurst School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 103514
LEA Birmingham
Inspection number 276940
Inspection dates 18 January 2006 to 19 January 2006
Reporting inspector Cathy Morgan HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive	School address	Brook Lane
School category	Community		Birmingham
Age range of pupils	11 to 19		West Midlands B13 0TW
Gender of pupils	Girls	Telephone number	0121 4642400
Number on roll	1757	Fax number	0121 4642401
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mrs Roberta McDonald
Date of previous inspection	2 May 2000	Headteacher	Mrs Elaine Kenney

Age group 11 to 19	Inspection dates 18 January 2006 - 19 January 2006	Inspection number 276940
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Swanshurst is a large comprehensive school for girls aged 11 to 19, with a very small number of boys in the sixth form. Over two thirds of students in the main school and 86% of students in the sixth form are from minority ethnic groups. There are 1,753 students on roll. Over 50% of students in the main school and three quarters of students in the sixth form have English as an additional language (EAL). A high proportion of students, 39%, are eligible for free school meals and 88% of students in the sixth form qualify for the education maintenance allowance. The proportion of students identified as having special educational needs (SEN) and of those with statements is below the national average. The school achieved specialist science status in September 2003.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Inspectors agree with the school's self-evaluation that this is a good and improving school. The effective management and strong leadership teams are well supported by the governing body. The school has a number of distinct features, including its specialist science status. This has a direct and beneficial impact on staff and students and on the links with partner schools. The school makes excellent use of information and communication technology (ICT) to improve the quality of communication, teaching, learning and assessment. All teachers and managers make effective use of the wireless network from within each of the separate school buildings and from outside the school. A comprehensive and well designed programme of continuing professional development enables all staff to make best use of these resources to improve their work. Students' progress in relation to their prior attainment is good from the age of 11 to 16 and satisfactory in the sixth form. General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) examination results improved significantly in 2005. There is a strong ethos of care within the school and a wide range of links with the community. As a result, students' personal development is good. The school provides a safe and secure environment. The quality of education, particularly teaching, is good. The school has the full confidence of parents and of its students. It works well with other partners in order to improve provision, especially for its more vulnerable girls. Staff morale is high and there is no doubting their determination to provide the best opportunities for the students. Whilst good use is made of the views of students and external consultants in evaluating the strengths and future developmental needs of the school, managers have over estimated the quality of provision in some areas, particularly that of the sixth form. Not all of the good practices in the main school are consistently and rigorously applied in the sixth form. Since the last inspection, the school has made good progress in addressing its weaknesses and it is well placed to continue improving. The school provides good value for money.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The school's evaluation of the effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form as good is too generous. Overall, the sixth form is satisfactory. Standards on entry to the sixth form are below average. Many higher attaining students leave the school after their GCSE examinations to study elsewhere. The school has been particularly effective in encouraging girls from minority ethnic groups to stay in education after the age of 16 and a significant number progress to higher education. Girls generally achieve the grades expected, based on their GCSE results, but a minority do not. Students are mature and most have good attitudes to work. Teaching is good and, where students attend regularly, their learning is good. Although sixth form girls are well cared for and supported, the systems for monitoring attendance and identifying and supporting students who may underachieve are not as rigorous as in the rest of the school.

What the school should do to improve further

- develop more systematic approaches to improving attendance in the sixth form.
- ensure that good practices in the monitoring and support of students are consistently and rigorously applied in the sixth form.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

Students enter the school with attainment which is close to the national average and they make good progress by the end of Year 11. Standards at the end of Key Stages 3 and 4 have risen steadily since the time of the last inspection. The successful use of target setting is improving achievement in English across the school. The school is working hard to further improve standards and achievement at Key Stage 3, particularly in its specialist area of science, where a few students attain lower than expected levels. The school's strategies to raise achievement at Key Stage 4 are successful. The proportion of students achieving five or more A* to C grades at GCSE rose significantly from 56% in 2004 to 69% in 2005. At 97%, the proportion of girls achieving five or more A* to G grades at GCSE was above the national average. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities make similar progress to other students. Standards on entry to the sixth form are below average due to many higher attaining students continuing their education elsewhere. Pass rates in GCE and VCE courses are generally around the national average but the proportion of students who gain high grades is low. The school's post-16 results represent satisfactory progress for many girls but there is significant variation in attainment between different subjects.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students' personal development improves well during their time at school. Girls enjoy school life and praise the friendly and safe environment. Spiritual development is good. Students become more confident as they progress through the school, demonstrating a deeper understanding of themselves and the needs of others. Students behave well, are usually orderly, purposeful and keen to learn. Cultural development is good and encouraged in subjects such as citizenship and geography. Students have good opportunities to voice their views and are proud to take responsibility as representatives on the school council or form groups. They have been effective in bringing about improvements within the school. For example, the 'Eco group' have taken a leading role in recycling and now recycled paper is collected in all classrooms. The well designed 'Development and Enrichment Programme' (DEP) effectively promotes the girls' understanding of relationship issues and the importance of adopting healthy lifestyles. Students make positive contributions to the community, including links with local companies and involvement with charities. Students develop workplace skills successfully, helped by the comprehensive work experience scheme. The DEP

programme promotes personal, social and health education, citizenship and work related learning well through an integrated scheme of work.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good. The school has very good procedures for sharing effective practice. Particularly innovative use is made of the school's website to facilitate this. The best teaching is challenging, exciting and imaginative. It provides many opportunities for students to develop a deeper understanding of complex topics and leads to very good learning. In one such example, a well designed science activity about how rapidly infections spread motivated students and successfully extended their understanding of the features of viruses and bacteria. In most lessons, teachers use a wide range of activities which are well matched to the learning needs of students. Teachers have high expectations of students, they employ effective questioning strategies and involve girls in collaborative work and discussion. ICT is frequently and effectively incorporated into lessons and students use computers confidently and competently. Teachers regularly assess students' performance and keep detailed electronic records so that they can track their progress and set realistic but challenging targets. Marking is frequently detailed with clear guidance for students on how to improve and, in the best cases, an expectation that students will rapidly respond to the comments teachers make on their work. Teaching in the sixth form is good and students generally learn well. Teachers treat students as adults and for the most part students respond responsibly by working hard and producing good quality work. On some occasions however, learning is detrimentally affected by absence.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school provides a good curriculum which fulfils statutory requirements. An extensive review of the 14-19 curriculum has led to the recent implementation of a 'Pathways' model which serves the needs of students of all abilities well. As a result, all students in Years 10 and 11 are able to follow a core curriculum supplemented by choices made from a wide selection of subjects, including vocational courses. The school's specialist status in science is producing benefits. There are successful links with local primary schools and the community. The school has provided resources and expertise in science which have enhanced the continuing professional development of all staff. The school's specialism has also improved the use of ICT by staff and students. Literacy provision is good. The use of numeracy in mathematics has improved since the time of the last inspection and is satisfactory in other subjects across the curriculum. All learners have opportunities to make good progress and to take part in work related learning. The enrichment programme gives students opportunities to study independently and to enjoy making contributions to the community. The sixth form curriculum is good. The school works hard to provide a choice of courses that

match the needs of students but this does not always provide well for the minority who do not attain well in their GCSE examinations.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

The school cares well for its students. The girls value the way teachers and other staff are approachable and helpful. There is a well planned careers education programme and the girls appreciate the care that staff take to guide them as they make decisions about their future. Form tutors undertake regular and effective academic reviews of the progress of each student which girls find helpful. Reports to parents are clear and are valuable in setting straightforward improvement targets for each subject. Systems for monitoring the attendance of students are effective in the main school but far less so in the sixth form. Strong support is given to students who need help with learning and to those who face other issues, for example, the few who are at an early stage of speaking English. Many staff operate an 'open door' policy to enable students with difficulties to seek advice and support easily. There are thorough and upto- date policies and procedures relating to child protection, anti-bullying and drug abuse. Sixth form students are well supported and safeguarded in both their studies and their personal development. However, a few students are encouraged to start courses in Year 12 which are over ambitious and this limits their achievement.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

Leadership and management are good overall and satisfactory in the sixth form. The headteacher, supported by the governing body and senior leadership team, provides a clear direction to the school. Governors are committed, have a good understanding of the school's unique features and are aware of its key challenges. Although standards at Key Stage 3 remain a concern for managers, the concentrated effort to prioritise and improve the GCSE performance of girls has been successful. The school's self-evaluation is generally accurate in identifying where improvements are needed, although actions to improve the quality of provision in the sixth form need to be more clearly defined. The performance management system is well designed and effectively linked to the professional development of individual staff and whole school improvement process. This has been particularly successful in improving the quality of teaching and learning. A number of initiatives have been prioritised in departmental improvement plans and many have been successfully implemented. These include rigorous and regular lesson observations, the introduction of a coaching programme and a highly supportive teaching and learning team. Excellent use is made of ICT to support the school's management and to improve communication. Staff, students, parents and partners make effective use of the school website to access the comprehensive online documentation. The use of data about students' performance

has improved since the time of the last inspection and staff are extremely positive about its potential use to set appropriate targets and to evaluate the school's effectiveness.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	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?	2	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	Yes
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

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

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?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	3

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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	3	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	2
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	2
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	Yes

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Dear Students Thank you for being so welcoming and helpful when we came to inspect your school recently. You were mature and sensible in the way that you spoke to each of us and we really enjoyed talking to you. Many of you were keen to tell us how much you enjoyed school and about your work in the community. We were particularly pleased to hear about how you have helped to improve your school through the work of the school council and the ECO group. Your parents generally believe that the school is successful. Swanshurst is a good and improving school. We were very impressed by your good behaviour and your positive relationships with one another and with your teachers. Your teachers work hard to ensure that you make good progress by the time they take their GCSE examinations; the results have really improved this year. We have asked them to continue to help you to achieve well, especially in the tests you take at the end of Year 9 and in the examinations some of you take in the sixth form. You all benefit greatly from good teaching. You are regularly active in lessons, work well together to solve problems and you make good use of ICT. You all receive good care and guidance. You said that you feel that the school is a safe place to be and that you have many opportunities to become involved in working in the community. Your attendance in the main school is improving and staff are working hard to improve this even further. In the sixth form, some students do not attend lessons regularly enough and this is preventing them from learning well. We particularly wish to see students in the sixth form attending more regularly, passing more of their examinations and gaining higher grades. We have asked the school to make this a priority. The headteacher and her senior managers make a good team. They know how the school is doing, where things are working well and where they can make improvements. The managers, teachers, governors and staff are highly committed to their work and know that your school has the potential to do even better. We wish you every success in the future. Yours sincerely Cathy Morgan HMI Lead Inspector