

Joseph Swan School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	131048
Local Authority	Gateshead
Inspection number	293696
Inspection dates	25–26 April 2007
Reporting inspector	Brian Blake 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
Number on roll	
School	1430
6th form	160
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Michael Houston
Headteacher	Mr Allan Fuller
Date of previous school inspection	1 September 2002
School address	Saltwell Road South Gateshead Tyne and Wear NE9 6LE
Telephone number	0191 4422000
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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

Joseph Swan School, which is larger than the average sized secondary school, has specialist status for technology. The school serves an area with higher than average levels of socio-economic deprivation. Although the vast majority of the school population are of White British heritage, the number of students from different minority ethnic backgrounds has increased since the previous inspection in 2002, and now stands at around 8%. There are only a few students who are at the very early stage of learning English as their second language. The number of students eligible for free school meals is above average, and those identified as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities broadly average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Joseph Swan is a good school, providing a good quality of education for its students. While standards in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science are average at both Key Stages 3 and 4, since the previous inspection in 2002, the school has been very successful in helping its students make good progress in their education, especially in vocational subjects. In Years 12 and 13, achievement is satisfactory overall, with standards broadly average.

The school is led well, with a clear sense of purpose and direction for further improvements. The recent changes that have occurred within the curriculum, especially at Key Stage 4, are helping more students enjoy their learning and achieve well in a range of subject areas. The students readily appreciate this flexible approach to curricular planning, which combines traditional academic subjects with vocational courses. The curriculum is further enhanced by the school's specialist status for technology, especially in the use of information and communication technology (ICT), and the strong links that have been established with external partners and local businesses. The comments of one student reflected the views of the majority: '...the work is interesting. You do lots of different things.' The staff at the school are playing an important part in helping the students to do the very best they can. Generally, the quality of teaching is good, although some is only satisfactory because teachers' planning and delivery do not take sufficient account of the full ability range in the lesson. The care, guidance and support provided are of good quality, and are clearly appreciated by the overwhelming majority of students. As one student was keen to point out: '...you get good support from teachers and the SAPs (student and parent service). There is always someone to talk to if you have problems.'

Recent developments in tracking performance, on a regular basis, are helping to identify underachieving students, to whom the school responds quickly and effectively. This overview of the students' attitudes and achievements underpins the good provision for the students' personal development and well-being, and is characterised by the positive action to encourage healthy lifestyle choices: from eating healthily to being active. This latter area is meeting with success, as indicated by many students who were keen to praise the extra-curricular opportunities available at the school.

Although the provision in the main school is good, that in the sixth form is only satisfactory because recent developments and initiatives have yet to make a significant difference and, also, further work is needed to improve some aspects of provision that the students currently receive from the school. This applies, in particular, to the expanding and more varied curriculum, which has yet to be fully implemented. Also, while teaching is generally satisfactory, there are fewer opportunities for the students to take greater responsibility for their own learning. This issue is exacerbated by the poor punctuality of some Year 12 students, and the inconsistent quality of pastoral and academic support in tutorials.

The overwhelming majority of parents appreciate and praise the school's efforts in supporting their children. However, a small minority are concerned about the lack of homework, particularly in some of the core subjects, and the occasional delay in responding to parents' queries. Despite these concerns, the vast majority of parents feel that the senior staff, led by the new headteacher, are responding as quickly as they can to any queries raised.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form are satisfactory. Overall achievement is satisfactory and is better in vocational subjects than in the traditional academic courses. In 2006, students did not make the expected progress in several subjects, especially at AS level, with two out of every five students not returning to Year 13. Current data show those who entered Year 13 in September tend to make good progress. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall, with classroom relationships very good. Most lessons are well planned but, in some, there is a limited range of teaching styles and not enough opportunities to develop students' independent learning skills. Additionally, the use of assessment information to plan lessons is not yet consistently applied across all sixth form subjects. Although satisfactory, the curriculum is in transition and is moving towards more flexible options, including BTEC and applied courses. The programme of curriculum enrichment activities, community service and work experience is good. Students' personal development and well-being are satisfactory, but some lack of independence, commitment and sense of urgency can be seen in Year 12. This is evident in the approach to punctuality of those students excused at morning registration. Care and guidance are satisfactory overall, but there is variation in the quality of tutor guidance. Students receive good careers guidance, especially about higher education, and good links with several universities are encouraging the students to aim high. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Recent changes have led to greater rigour in the monitoring and evaluation of most aspects of the sixth form. Although more robust systems to support students, to track their progress and to involve them in regular self-reviews and target setting have been introduced, these have not been in place long enough to have had sufficient impact.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve teachers' planning and delivery to take better account of the range of different abilities in classes.
- Within the sixth form, the school should:
- develop classroom strategies to increase opportunities to involve the students more in their own learning and to become more effective independent learners
- improve the punctuality to lessons
- monitor the effectiveness of tutorials as an aid to ensuring all students receive good quality pastoral and academic support.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

The overall standards achieved by students are satisfactory, and their achievement good. In Years 12 and 13, achievement is satisfactory overall, with standards broadly average. Students start at the school in Year 7 with standards which are broadly average. By the end of Key Stage 3, students have maintained this average standard, although there is some minor variation in performance across the three core subjects. For example, in 2006, mathematics and science improved from the previous year, but English declined. By the time the students reach the end of Key Stage 4, standards are average for the number of A* to C grades that include students' performance in English and mathematics. It is, however, well above average for five or more GCSE grades A* to C that do not necessarily include these two core subjects. Students' overall

progress from Key Stage 2 to 4 is good because of the school's success in vocational subjects. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities also make good progress during their time at the school.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

Students' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good in the main school and satisfactory in the sixth form.

Students are aware of healthy lifestyle choices, from eating healthily to being active. Students feel safe because they believe that teachers listen and respond quickly to any concerns raised, although some younger students indicated that the anti-social behaviour of a very small minority was a cause of personal concern.

Although attendance is broadly average, the students indicate that they enjoy school because they feel well supported by teachers, they have access to a varying range of activities, and they are making progress with their learning. Students value the opportunity to contribute to their lessons, especially when asked for their opinion about important issues, such as appreciating the cultural differences found in different world religions. These types of learning opportunities encourage the students to show a positive attitude to their work, teachers and peers, which results in good behaviour and good progress in lessons. This good behaviour is helping to foster respect for fellow students, staff, and the school environment.

Students are involved in a range of decision-making activities, especially those who are working towards re-developing the school council. Students speak very positively about recent school surveys and the influence that they now have on uniform choices and the appointment of new staff. The vocational options at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form provide students with good opportunities to develop their awareness about economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

Teaching and learning are good in the main school and satisfactory in the sixth form. The majority of teaching is effective and engaging, and characterised by clear learning objectives and good pace, which contribute to students' good progress. However, the quality of teaching in the sixth form is satisfactory because there are fewer opportunities for the students to take greater responsibility for their own learning. The vast majority of lessons include a range of suitable teaching styles, which helps students' learning. A few lessons, however, are too teacher focused, which leads to a slower pace of learning, especially for higher attainers. Many teachers are particularly adept in relating lesson content into everyday life, which makes the learning more relevant for the students.

Teachers' assessment of students' progress in learning, and a more open ended style of teacher questioning are developing well in a number of lessons, although this is not yet seen consistently across the whole school. Effective strategies to manage challenging behaviour are used to maintain the flow and pace of lessons, and particularly vulnerable students are supported well

in order to maintain the continuity of their learning. Targeted support from the senior leadership team for those teachers who are finding the implementation of these behaviour strategies demanding is resulting in improvements in the quality of teaching.

Relationships are good, and most students listen attentively and follow instructions well. Where issues arise, students know that they have a range of ways in which they can be supported to resolve these.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

The school's curriculum is good in the main school and satisfactory in the sixth form. The curriculum is sufficiently flexible to provide vocational and traditional academic courses to students and external partners as part of its extended school approach to local community involvement. This well balanced provision has resulted in the school helping students to achieve some good results in vocational courses at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, and to make good overall progress in their learning. The curricular flexibility at Key Stage 4 is helping to smooth the transition for students moving between the main school and the sixth form.

The curriculum is further enhanced by the school's specialist status for technology. For example, ICT is being used effectively across the school to help develop independent learning in the resource centre, and the strong links with external partners and local businesses are helping to make a positive contribution to the students' educational well-being.

The school's strategy for putting students into ability sets within the curriculum is working well, but there is some inconsistency in all teachers recognising that this demands more effective planning and delivery of lessons to ensure that all abilities are well catered for. The school involves students and parents effectively when course options are being chosen, which results in better awareness and understanding of future career options.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

The quality of care, guidance and support is good in the main school and satisfactory in the sixth form. Students' progress is tracked well to show the levels and grades they are reaching in their work. Although the guidance that the students receive is mostly precise and helpful, it is sometimes too vague. The school is aware of this, and is developing strategies to bring about greater consistency across the school. The tracking system for monitoring progress effectively identifies students who are underachieving. As a result of this monitoring, additional support is then quickly allocated. The vast majority of students who receive this support or take part in intervention strategies make good progress.

The school also provides good support at times of transition. Year 7 students speak positively of their experience during the 'induction week'. Detailed guidance is given to Year 9 students on examination course options, and to Year 11 students on their future education, employment and training opportunities. The school successfully involves parents or carers at these key times, including programmed meetings to discuss the children's progress. There are excellent systems in place to support vulnerable students, with a range of expertise, both within school and from outside agencies, to meet individual students' needs. Procedures for child protection are in

place. Students value highly the student and parent support service (SAPs) as an aid to discussing any problems they may have. A few students have reported bullying to staff, and this is dealt with quickly and effectively.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

Leadership and management are good overall and satisfactory in the sixth form. Together with the senior management team (SMT) and the governing body, the headteacher has led the school effectively since his arrival in September 2006. This collaborative working has resulted in a shared sense of purpose and focus on improvement, both within the school and in the well-established links with external partners and local businesses.

The self-evaluation is accurate, reflecting their good knowledge about the school. The SMT knows the school's strengths and weaknesses well, and is energetic in seeking improvements. For example, the traffic light system of assessment and target setting helps to provide future learning goals for the students, raise standards and combat underachievement. Also, the observation of staff and monitoring of lessons provides accurate assessments of the quality of teaching and contributes well to the professional development of teachers. Weekly meetings between the SMT and subject leaders further ensure good monitoring of provision.

The governing body provides good support and backing for all staff, and its status and professionalism have been enhanced by the creation of link governors to monitor the work of the school.

A supportive, challenging and open management style, together with an awareness of school improvement issues, demonstrates a good capacity to improve; the early indicators of which are now in evidence. The school achieves good value for money.

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Annex A

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 effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2
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	3	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	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	3	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	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 the learners' needs?	2	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	3
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 to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

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	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

26 April 2007

Inspection of Joseph Swan School, Gateshead, NE9 6LE

Dear Students

You will know that I recently visited your school with four other inspectors to assess how well you are doing in your education, and the extent to which the school is helping you to achieve the best of which you are all capable. On behalf of the inspection team, I should like to thank you for making our time in school so interesting. Without your willingness to talk openly about being a student at Joseph Swan we could not have reached the conclusions that we did. I should also like to thank all those parents who took the time to return the pre-inspection questionnaire, many of whom raised very important points that inspectors considered very carefully during the inspection.

You will, of course, want to know what we have said about your school, and if we are asking it to make any improvements. Given what we saw, what we heard from you, your parents and the staff, we are able to say to you that Joseph Swan is a good school, which is making every reasonable effort to help you enjoy what you do and to achieve well. While we felt that there were a number of good things in the main school, provision in the sixth form is satisfactory. Inspectors wanted you to know about some of the school's main strengths.

- Standards are mostly average in traditional subjects and good in vocational courses. This means that the vast majority of you make good progress during your time at the school.
- The school cares for and supports you well, giving you good quality guidance for choosing courses and possible future careers.
- There is a good emphasis on helping you to be better aware of healthy lifestyle choices, including eating healthily and being active.
- Teaching is mostly good, although some lessons are only satisfactory.
- The curriculum is good and is providing you with a range of options for future study.
- The school is led well, with important contributions from the governors helping to raise the profile of everything that the school does.

We are, however, asking the school to make some improvements, especially in the sixth form. Specifically, we would like the school to improve the following.

- Help teachers improve their planning and delivery of lessons so that it takes better account of the range of abilities in every class.
- Increase the opportunities to involve sixth form students more in their own learning, as an aid to encouraging greater independence from teachers.
- Improve the punctuality of sixth form students to lessons.
- Monitor the effectiveness of tutorials to ensure that all sixth form students receive good quality pastoral and academic support.

You all have an important part to play in helping the school to do even better, through hard work, good attendance, and positive attitudes to your work.

I wish you all the very best for your future.

Brian Blake
Her Majesty’s Inspector

Annex B