

Swadelands School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118793
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	313093
Inspection dates	3–4 December 2008
Reporting inspector	Susan Frater 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 (total)	864
Sixth form	104
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Justin Byrd
Headteacher	Richard Baddeley
Date of previous school inspection	7 March 2005
School address	Ham Lane Lenham Maidstone ME17 2QJ
Telephone number	01622 858267
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Age group	11–18
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Swadelands School is of average size and serves an area where admission to schools is determined by academic ability and includes selective schools. There are more boys than girls in the school. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is average. The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups is similar to that found in most schools and includes Romany or Gypsy students. Very few students are at an early stage of learning English. A high proportion of students, about a third, have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and an above average number have a statement of special educational need. Learning difficulties and/or disabilities relate mainly to speech and language, specific learning (dyslexia) and behaviour. The number of students joining or leaving the school other than in Year 7 is much higher than usual. There is less social deprivation than in most schools. The school has specialist sports college status. It is an associate training school and a hub for specialist sports coordination in the area. It has gained Investors in People status and awards in Quality in Study Support (QISS) and Quality in Extended Schools (QESS).

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

In accordance with section 13(3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a notice to improve. Significant improvement is required in the achievement and standards of students in Years 7 to 11, in the quality of teaching and learning, and in the use of challenging targets.

The school's overall effectiveness is inadequate. Standards are too low and students do not make sufficient progress to meet their targets. The proportion of students gaining the equivalent of five or more A* to C grades in the GCSE examinations has improved and is now higher than at the time of the previous inspection. However, standards across the range of subjects, and for those gaining five or more A* to C grades including English and mathematics, remain well below average and well below the school's target. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities progress at the same rate as others.

Students, especially the more able, fail to reach most of their targets because too much of the teaching does not challenge them enough. The quality of teaching and learning is inconsistent across and within subjects and teaching and learning are inadequate. This is because most teachers are not using students' individual challenging targets to inform the level of work to be covered in lessons. Most lessons are pitched at the same level for all students, usually the middle ability group in the class. This was the case even in many of the better lessons observed. It often results in the more able students being bored, the less able struggling and, at times, some disruptive behaviour. The most effective lessons engage students in practical investigation, problem solving and sharing ideas in groups. Thus, students work at their own levels and support each other. Students say they enjoy such lessons, and give mathematics as an example, but they do not enjoy all their lessons. They make good progress in mathematics. To meet the needs and aspirations of students, the curriculum has been broadened to include more vocational and applied subjects. As a result, the curriculum is satisfactory.

The school did not reach its targets for standards in the specialist subjects of physical education (PE) and information and communication technology (ICT), but it has used sport well to promote students' personal development and well-being, which are satisfactory. Across the school, students develop effective social skills and make a positive contribution to the community through fundraising for charity and leading sport activities in local primary schools. Students say they enjoy the very many opportunities they have to participate in physical education and other clubs and activities. As a result, the school has met its target for increasing participation in sport and students have a good understanding of the role it plays in keeping them healthy.

The care, guidance and support provided for students are satisfactory. The new student services team works well with external agencies, for example to improve attendance. It has had some, albeit limited, success in working towards the school's target to reduce the number of students who are persistently absent. A new behaviour policy is helping to reduce the number of exclusions from school. Guidance on choosing courses and careers is effective, but academic guidance, in the form of teachers' marking, is inconsistent and does not always indicate how students can improve their work and reach their targets.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher has initiated a number of improvements to move the school forward, particularly in relation to the curriculum. He has

introduced challenging targets and a new system for tracking students' progress at whole-school level. These changes are not yet being applied consistently, or with sufficient rigour, to make a significant difference to raising standards or improving the quality of teaching and learning. Lesson monitoring and evaluation are insufficiently focused on students' progress towards their challenging targets to inform the necessary improvements in teaching. However, given the improvements made and the continuing development of senior and subject leaders, and reorganisation of governors, leadership and management demonstrate satisfactory capacity to improve.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

In relation to their levels of attainment on entry to Year 12, students make satisfactory progress in the sixth form. Although they reach below average standards, this represents satisfactory achievement. Their performance varies across subjects, depending on the quality of teaching, and is better in vocational courses. Lessons are well organised, but opportunities for students to develop their skills of independent learning are limited. Activities are not always matched to students' needs and the more able students in particular are sometimes insufficiently challenged. Students appreciate the feedback they receive from their teachers and find it helps them to make progress. They enjoy good relationships with their teachers and with each other. The curriculum is satisfactory and has been broadened to include vocational courses. These have attracted more students into the sixth form, and are beginning to improve attendance and the low retention rates. Students are given appropriate information, advice and guidance to enable them to progress to further or higher education, or employment. They develop into thoughtful young adults who willingly take responsibility, such as mentoring younger students in the recently introduced mixed-age tutor groups. Leadership and management of the sixth form are satisfactory. Self-evaluation is accurate and identifies appropriate areas for further improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve students' progress in all subjects, particularly in English, to raise standards substantially.
- Ensure lessons are pitched at the right levels of challenge to enable all students to reach their individual targets.
- Provide students with opportunities to engage in more investigative and collaborative work in lessons.
- Focus lesson monitoring and evaluation on students' progress towards meeting their challenging targets.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Students join the school in Year 7 with below average standards. Their progress between Years 7 and 11 is not fast enough to close the gap with national standards and they do not meet their targets. Over the past three years, the gap has widened in Years 10 and 11. Students' achievement is inadequate and their standards are well below average, particularly in English. In order to address this situation, the school has introduced BTEC courses to enable students to achieve. As a result, the proportion of students gaining the equivalent of five or more A* to C grades in the GCSE examinations has improved. The schools' own assessment data indicate

that although standards remain well below average, this improvement in GCSE results is expected to continue in 2009. However, the variable quality of teaching and learning currently is not addressing the significant underachievement across subjects, including English. Vulnerable students, those from minority ethnic groups, and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities progress at the same rate as others.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. Students on the school council display a strong sense of morality in helping the school to tackle bullying. They develop socially and culturally through the very many extra-curricular activities provided as part of the school's extended services. Their spiritual awareness, and understanding of Britain as a diverse society, is more limited, although promoted in subjects such as religious education and citizenship. The sports college ethos contributes positively to community cohesion and students generally relate well to each other. Students eat healthily and enjoy participating in the many opportunities provided for sport. However, they say they enjoy only some of their lessons across the school. Their attendance appears to reflect this, as it is well below the national average. Some parents express concern about behaviour. Behaviour around the school and in lessons was seen to be satisfactory overall, and better in lessons that interest and engage the students. Students report that they feel safe both in school and in travelling to and from the site. They say that teachers address bullying effectively. Through enterprise activities, work experience and lessons in financial literacy, they develop a satisfactory range of relevant skills to support their further education and future employment.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 4

The school judges its teaching to be satisfactory. However, evidence from the observation of lessons, scrutiny of students' work and the progress they make, shows that it is not yet strong enough to ensure all students make the progress necessary to meet their targets. There is some good teaching, but teaching is inconsistent across the school. Too many lessons lead to inadequate progress. Most teachers establish satisfactory relationships with their students and this ensures that lessons take place in a positive atmosphere. Teachers structure their lessons carefully, but they do not always identify clearly what learning is to take place, or check carefully at the end of the lesson what has been learned. In addition, assessment information is not used consistently to match work to the needs of individuals and groups within the class. As a result, not all students are challenged to make sufficient progress. Where learning is most effective, teachers use their good subject knowledge to pose challenging questions and give students sufficient time to respond thoughtfully and to share their ideas. In such lessons, students' rate of progress is faster. This is reflected in their active engagement in the lesson and evident interest in the work they are undertaking. In some lessons, teachers do not manage behaviour well. This results in some students not focusing on their work and disrupting the learning of others. Not enough use is made of students' targets to support learning on a day-to-day basis and to check that students are making the necessary progress to reach them.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

In reviewing its curriculum, the school has appropriately introduced a variety of vocational and applied courses, and opportunities for college-based and work-related programmes. It is too early to judge the impact of these on achievement and attendance. However, the curriculum now meets the needs and aspirations of students more effectively. It ensures a smoother pathway between the ages of 14 to 19. Extending the range of courses in the school's specialist subjects has been effective in motivating more students to stay on to continue their studies in the sixth form. A good number of students participate regularly in the very wide range of extra-curricular activities provided. Citizenship, 'focus days' and personal, social and health education promote well the personal development of all students. Specialist provision for vulnerable students and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities promotes equality of opportunity. The school has identified the need to develop further students' literacy, numeracy and ICT skills. The physical education department is leading developments in these skills by providing staff training. Schemes of work in many subjects, including English, are being reviewed currently to map progression across the school in developing students' knowledge, understanding and skills.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The school is committed to promoting students' safety, health and well-being. Its arrangements for the safeguarding of students are robust and reviewed regularly. The student services team provides effective care and support. It liaises well with external agencies to provide extended services such as counselling and family learning. It also works in partnership with external agencies to reduce the number of students who are persistently absent. While this has had a positive effect on some individual pupils, it has not yet made a significant impact on overall attendance figures. Implementation of a new behaviour policy has reduced significantly the number of exclusions. Students and parents comment on the success of the 'Fit for Life' programme in helping the transition from primary to secondary school. Students report they are guided appropriately in their choice of course options. Through effective careers advice, they are aware of the qualifications required for their career choices. Academic guidance is improving through the introduction of new procedures for tracking students' progress and specific days in which targets are set and reviewed. Some students know their targets, but they do not know how to improve their work to reach them. Teachers' marking of work is inconsistent and provides limited guidance to aid progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher has been in post for almost two years. In that time he has begun to address the legacy of underachievement. He has appropriately redefined the roles and responsibilities of the senior leadership team, and has implemented continuing professional development for subject leaders. The headteacher and senior leadership team have established a clear vision of improvement, with the specialist subjects leading the way forward, for example in curriculum development. Self-evaluation has led to senior and subject leaders identifying relevant priorities for improvement. However, the monitoring and evaluation of the impact of the actions taken

lacks rigour. Consequently, improvements in the quality of teaching and learning have been too slow and are too variable to raise standards and achievement across all subjects. Improvements at whole-school level in setting challenging targets and monitoring students' progress have led to a rise in standards in some subjects, notably mathematics, but standards in other subjects, such as English, have declined. This is because not all teachers are using students' challenging targets to raise standards in lessons. The school is committed to the inclusion of all learners and promotes equality of opportunity satisfactorily through specialist provision, for example for vulnerable students. The school makes a satisfactory contribution to community cohesion through its introduction of vertical tutor groups, links with local residents and primary schools, and with international schools, for example in Malaysia. Over half the students in Year 11 take the sports leadership course and work with pupils in local schools. Good use is made of the sport facilities by the local community. The school has experienced staffing difficulties but has now appointed sufficient suitably qualified teachers. However, given the outcomes for students, the deployment of resources leads to inadequate value for money. Governors ensure statutory requirements are met and they support the school well. They are improving their strategies for challenging the school's performance.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	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?	4	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	4	

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	4	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3	3

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	4	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	3	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	
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?	Yes	

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

5 December 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Swadelands School, Maidstone ME17 2QJ

Thank you for contributing to the recent inspection of your school. My fellow inspectors and I enjoyed talking to you. We were impressed with your mature attitudes and your willingness to take responsibility, such as leading sport activities in local primary schools. We were pleased to hear that you enjoy the very many extra-curricular clubs and activities, and particularly sport activities, your school provides.

- We found that the headteacher and the staff are making the curriculum more interesting for you by introducing new vocational courses in Years 10 to 13. The new student services team takes good care of you. It provides appropriate help to those of you who are experiencing difficulty, for example with your behaviour or attendance. Better monitoring of your progress is improving the school's GCSE results. However, we found that many of you do not make the progress you should in all your lessons. You told us that you enjoy only some of your lessons. For these reasons, we think that the school requires additional help if it is to improve and so we have given it a notice to improve. In particular, we have asked the headteacher and senior staff to:
 - enable you to make good progress in all your lessons and to reach higher standards, particularly in English
 - help teachers to pitch the lessons at the right levels of challenge for everyone in the class, to enable all of you to reach your targets
 - make all your lessons interesting by providing opportunities for you to learn through practical investigation, problem solving and sharing ideas
 - focus on your progress towards your challenging targets when they monitor your lessons.

You can help by monitoring your own progress towards your targets, and by ensuring you all behave well and attend school regularly. Other inspectors will visit the school during the year to see how well you are progressing.

We wish you success in the future.

Yours faithfully

Sue Frater Her Majesty's Inspector