

Swanmead Community School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123875
Local Authority	Somerset
Inspection number	314751
Inspection dates	8–9 July 2008
Reporting inspector	Anne Looney 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 on roll	
School	292
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ian Munro
Headteacher	Paul Birbeck
Date of previous school inspection	24 January 2005
School address	Ditton Street Ilminster TA19 0BL
Telephone number	01460 52431
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Age group	9-13
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Swanmead Community School is a smaller than average middle school. Almost all the pupils are of White British background. Pupils come from a range of social and economic backgrounds but a significant minority of pupils experience difficult social circumstances. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is broadly average, with far more boys than girls in that group. The school is part of a federation of 33 schools which form a Community Learning Partnership. The school has recently received re-accreditation as an Investors in People organisation and has full International Award status with links to a school in Zambia.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Swanmead Community School provides a satisfactory standard of education. Standards at the end of Year 6, as measured by the national tests, were broadly average in 2007. This was an improvement over the previous two years, particularly in English. The school has been working hard to develop pupils' writing skills and this resulted in better test results. The school's own detailed tracking indicates that pupils make satisfactory progress over Years 5 and 6 and at least satisfactory progress in Years 7 and 8. The school's data, which are based on optional test results and internal assessment, also show that pupils are on track to meet their realistic, rather than challenging, targets at the end of Year 6 in 2008.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are satisfactory. Pupils' social and cultural development is good. Pupils say they feel safe and are particularly enthusiastic about keeping fit through sport. Attendance has improved and is now good, but not all pupils say that they enjoy coming to school. There was some poor behaviour earlier in the year. Pupils report that this has now improved, but that there is still some disruption, particularly in classes in Year 7. Inspectors agree and found that behaviour is satisfactory overall. It is now often good in lessons, and the school environment is generally calm and well ordered.

The curriculum is good. It is broad and balanced and meets the needs of all learners well. It is extended well by theme weeks and workshops which contribute to pupils' developing global and environmental awareness. There is a good range of well-supported enrichment activities. The care, guidance and support pupils receive are satisfactory overall. The way in which the school cares for pupils' well-being is good, as is its attention to the needs of pupils who need extra support to be able to join in with school life. Pupils' progress is tracked in all subjects and pupils know the levels at which they are working. Not all pupils, however, are sufficiently clear about what they need to do to improve to reach the next level. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Teaching is good in some respects. Teachers provide well-planned lessons with a range of activities, and planning is well supported by teachers' good subject knowledge. Although there has been an improvement in the level of consistency in the way in which teachers manage behaviour, there are still a few lessons where behaviour is not managed effectively in line with the school's policy. Not all parents and carers are sufficiently involved with their children's learning.

The school leadership has experienced a real challenge this year because of the level of unexpected staff absence due to illness. This led to disruption caused by the large number of supply teachers the school had to employ to maintain provision and pupils were unsettled. The leadership team and the governing body, with the support of the local authority, dealt robustly with the ensuing discipline problems. A significant proportion of parents who wrote to the inspectors expressed concern that the situation was not being managed well enough and that poor behaviour was still the norm, but inspectors disagreed with this view as the incidents of disruption have decreased considerably and pupils' progress has not been impaired. Because of the time the headteacher and his deputy have needed to devote to these issues, and the fact that subject coordinators have limited management time, monitoring, evaluating and improvement planning have been underdeveloped this year. The school does, however, have an accurate and realistic view of its areas of strength and areas for development. Progress since the last inspection has been satisfactory, as is the school's capacity to improve.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the rate of progress pupils make, particularly in Years 5 and 6.
- Improve behaviour by ensuring that teachers manage it consistently.
- Involve parents and carers further in their children's learning.
- Use tracking data to ensure that pupils understand exactly what they need to do to improve their work.
- Monitor the work of the school more rigorously so that leaders at all levels know exactly what needs to be improved.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Standards are broadly average. There was an overall improvement in 2007 in English, mathematics and science but improvement was more marked in English. In an effort to raise standards, the school has identified areas of weakness well and has provided extra teaching, booster classes and individualised computer work schemes, and has adopted a whole-school approach to literacy. It has also collaborated closely with the main feeder school. These initiatives are starting to bring about improvements. The school's data show that given pupils' starting points, progress over Years 5 and 6 is satisfactory, and it is at least satisfactory in Years 7 and 8, where it is good in mathematics, information and communication technology (ICT) and French. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities also make satisfactory progress over their four years at the school.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall. Pupils have a good understanding of cultural difference, which has developed largely through their international school links. They are developing well socially through opportunities to work collaboratively in class and by going on school visits. Pupils know that they need to keep healthy by eating sensibly and they enjoy being active. They say they feel safe and know whom to turn to if they need help. They have a good understanding of the need of safety in specialist teaching rooms and when using the internet. Although attendance is now above average, not all pupils say that they enjoy school, although they are all confident enough to speak about their problems and air their views. The poor behaviour that disrupted the learning of a significant number of pupils earlier in the year is now rarer. Good behaviour is now the norm in the majority of lessons although a small number of older pupils, particularly boys, continue to disrupt lessons. Pupils contribute well to their school and the wider community. They act as peer mediators once they are in Year 8, represent their peers on the school council, and fundraise both as groups and as individuals. Their good social and teamworking skills, combined with sound basic skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT, mean that the way they are prepared for the next stage of education and future life is satisfactory.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teachers plan well for variety and their plans show a good awareness of the need to develop literacy and general study skills, as well as those needed for independent research. There were many good examples seen during the inspection of pupils using ICT for research and presentation. Learning objectives, although clear, are not consistently expressed in terms of what pupils need to learn but rather what activities they will complete. This makes accurate assessment at the end of the lesson difficult. Some teachers are systematically providing opportunities for peer- and self-evaluation and this encourages a sense of responsibility for their own learning as well as a good awareness of what they need to do to improve. This is not consistent practice.

Teachers deploy teaching assistants well to ensure that pupils who need it receive targeted support. The level of inconsistency in the way that teachers manage pupils' behaviour has reduced considerably now that the staffing is more stable. In the few lessons where behaviour is not managed as effectively, there is a negative impact on pupils' enjoyment of the subject. There is a lack of consistency in the use of systems for rewards and sanctions by teachers and this leads to some resentment in pupils.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum meets all statutory requirements and promotes well pupils' understanding of healthy lifestyles, enterprise skills and their economic well-being. It also provides well for gifted and talented pupils. A large number of talented mathematicians are involved in the Junior Mathematics Challenge and pupils have entered the innovation competition for science. Support for extra-curricular activities is very good and the school has a commitment to providing extended learning opportunities through residential visits for all year groups. There is good provision for ICT, which is used by teachers and pupils to good effect in their work in other subjects. The school curriculum is well supported by local industry and community organisations.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

A team of well-informed teaching assistants effectively supports the work of the teachers in promoting pupils' personal development, well-being and safety. The 'Ace Base' provides a secure base for pupils experiencing difficulties and allows them to partake of school life, but away from the main school. The pupil support team plays an important role as listeners and mediators for pupils. Child protection procedures are very rigorous and well planned, and their implementation is carefully monitored. These procedures are rightly highly regarded by the external agencies with which the school works. Induction into the school is good, as is the transfer to the next stage of their education at the end of Year 8. The use of transition modules developed at subject level ease that transfer. Whilst the care and support the school gives its pupils are good, the guidance on how to improve their work is not consistent across all teachers and with all groups of pupils. Pupils' progress is tracked in all subjects and the vast majority of pupils were able to tell inspectors exactly what level they were working at. Not all pupils could clearly articulate what they needed to do in that subject to improve.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The senior leadership team and the governing body are clear in their evaluation of the school's inclusive nature and of the need to keep pupils in full-time education. This is a view shared by staff, although the responsibility for setting the direction of the school lies firmly at the door of the headteacher and his deputy, as middle managers are also full-time teachers. This has been particularly significant this year as the school has dealt with the absence through illness of a third of the teaching staff. The headteacher and his deputy managed the disruption and coordinated well the support needed for teachers experiencing difficulties. They disciplined pupils and ensured parents and carers were aware of the poor behaviour and sanctions taken. They were also vigilant in ensuring that tracking of pupils' progress continued to take place. Subsequently the number of reported incidents of disruptions has been greatly reduced since staffing stabilised and academic progress has remained satisfactory. The day-to-day management of the school has been maintained and the school has been re-accredited as an Investors in People organisation.

The school's self-assessment is accurate and realistic. The time allowed for formal monitoring, evaluation and improvement planning has been constrained this year because of the disruption and a lack of middle management capacity and so these areas have been underdeveloped. The school's very appropriate two-year development plan was refocused correctly onto one concentrating on behaviour.

The governing body has supported, and continues to support, the senior leadership team well but governors are also not afraid to fulfil their role in challenging the headteacher. Since the last inspection, new buildings have ensured good accommodation for design and technology and improved physical education facilities.

The school works well in partnership with a range of schools, teacher-training institutions and other external agencies. Relationships with parents are not always as strong as they might be.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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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?	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	3
The attendance of learners	2
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 the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	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?	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	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	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

10 July 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Swanmead Community School, Ilminster TA19 0BL

As you know, three inspectors recently visited your school and so I am writing to you to tell you what we found. Thanks very much for talking to us and for making us feel welcome.

We believe that your school is satisfactory. We were pleased that you were able to talk to us so freely about your life at school. We thought that the fact that your school was an international school helped you develop an understanding of a culture different from your own. You also told us how much you appreciated school visits and we felt they helped you learn about getting on with other people. You told us you felt safe in school and we thought that your school looked after all the pupils well, but gave that bit of extra help to those who every so often needed more support. You have a good range of subjects to study and plenty of opportunities outside school to follow your other interests. Your school works well with other schools and with organisations that are there to offer support.

We found that you make satisfactory progress while you are at the school but that you do better in Years 7 and 8. We have asked the school to help you make faster progress right at the start of your life at Swanmead, and to involve your parents and carers even more in your learning. We felt that although behaviour has improved since your teachers returned, there are still some pupils who are making it difficult for others to learn. We have asked all teachers to deal with pupils' behaviour in the same way and make sure that you all behave in class. We would also like the school to help you improve your work by getting teachers to tell you exactly what you need to do to get better. Finally, we have asked the senior leaders and teachers who are in charge of subjects to make sure that they are regularly checking on the work of the school so that they know exactly what needs to be improved.

You can help by continuing to attend regularly, by behaving well and by acting on your teachers' advice.

With best wishes

Anne Looney HMI Lead Inspector