

Swanshurst School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	103514
Local Authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	323847
Inspection dates	24–25 September 2008
Reporting inspector	Gwendoline Coates HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Girls
Number on roll	
School (total)	1769
Sixth form	304
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Phillip Thickett
Headteacher	Elaine Kenney
Date of previous school inspection	18 January 2006
School address	Brook Lane Billesley Birmingham B13 0TW
Telephone number	0121 4642400
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Age group	11–19
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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 School is a very large school for girls with a very small number of boys in the sixth form. Over 70% of its students are from minority ethnic groups. The largest ethnic group is Pakistani, which accounts for approximately 44% of students, followed by White British forming approximately 27%. Other ethnic groups each form no more than 6% of the school population. Over half of all students speak English as an additional language and in the sixth form this increases to two thirds. Many students live in challenging socio-economic areas and the percentage of students eligible for free school meals is double the national average. The percentage of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below the national average. Swanshurst School achieved training school status in 1999 and specialist science college status in 2003.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Swanshurst is a good school. Despite its size, it maintains a real sense of community. Students enjoy their time at the school and this is evident from their good attendance, the above average standards they attain at GCSE and the good progress they make. The school provides a healthy and secure learning environment for students, and parents are confident that their children are safe and very well supported. As one parent noted, it is 'a well organised, well disciplined and caring school'. Students are provided with good opportunities to make positive contributions to the school and wider community. For example, within the school they act as peer mentors, and at an international level they have collected money for the victims of the Pakistani earthquake. The school's success in gaining international school status in 2008 and its links with a school in South Africa also show how it tries to promote community cohesion, not only on a local basis but also on a global basis. Students' economic well-being is developed well through the good focus on literacy and numeracy, their work experience in Year 11 and work shadowing in the sixth form, and the general emphasis on developing their confidence and self-esteem.

The headteacher sets high expectations and is instrumental in driving the school forward. As one parent noted, 'The school is run by an able, talented and well informed headteacher. Teachers reflect her inspiring headship in their devotion to teaching and care for the children in the school. The management of such a large school is a tribute to the skills of the headteacher.'

As a result of declining standards and achievement in 2006 and 2007, a well focused strategy to improve the quality of provision for students has been implemented. This has resulted in improvements to the quality of teaching and learning and an improved curriculum to match the needs of all students, although the level of challenge in lessons is not yet consistently high. Excellent care, guidance and support now ensure that students' progress is rigorously monitored, underachievement is identified promptly and appropriate intervention strategies are put in place speedily. The result of this intense focus on improvement has been a substantial rise in students' attainment, such that in 2008, the school's data suggest that students have attained better results at all key stages than in any previous year. The impact of the school's strategies to improve students' achievement and standards demonstrates that the school has good capacity to sustain, and make further, improvements.

The school's specialist science college status is having a positive impact on the school and its partners, including local primary schools and other secondary schools as well as the local community. This, together with the impact of training school status, is also having a strong impact on the professional development of teachers within Swanshurst and its partners and thus on teaching and learning.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Students enjoy and appreciate sixth form life. Following the last inspection, the school carried out an in-depth review of provision, and areas for improvement were identified beyond those raised in the last inspection report. The changes made have strengthened leadership and management and the curriculum, and have led to significant improvements in students'

achievements. Attendance is now good, and the systems in place to monitor the progress of individual students and provide additional support are major factors in improving achievement.

Students join the sixth form with below average standards. Careful guidance and a well structured induction programme ensure that they follow courses appropriate to their interests and aptitudes. Consequently students enjoy their courses and good teaching helps them to achieve well. Attainment in examinations is in line with national averages. In the last two years there has been a marked improvement in the proportion of students achieving the higher grades in AS and A-level courses and there is a rising trend in the results from vocational courses. The very small number of boys in the sixth form make good progress and their achievement is in line with that of the girls.

Students speak warmly of the outstanding guidance they receive from adults, both for their personal and academic development. They particularly value the support given through regular mentoring sessions and the fact that they are well known to their teachers. The school's provision helps students to develop into mature and confident young people who are good role models for younger pupils. Links with another local school broaden curriculum choice and links with universities are used well in supporting students to make appropriate choices for further and higher education. Students relish the opportunities they have to contribute to whole school life, for example, as mentors for younger pupils or leading charity events. These activities, together with opportunities beyond the school, such as an engineering project with a large local commercial organisation, help to develop students' leadership skills and prepare them successfully for their future economic well-being.

What the school should do to improve further

- Extend the level of challenge so that students make good progress in all lessons.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students start the school in Year 7 with slightly below average attainment, make good progress during their time at the school and reach standards in GCSE examinations that are above national averages. According to the school's own data, results for 2008 indicate that students' attainment has risen substantially across all key stages. In tests at the end of Year 9, there have been gains in all three core subjects of English, mathematics and science. There has been a marked improvement in the percentage of students gaining five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C, from 61% in 2007 to 72% in 2008. The percentage of students gaining five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, has also improved and is now above the national average. The school's inclusive approach ensures that students of all abilities and ethnic backgrounds, as well as those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, achieve well.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students is good. They enter into mature, thoughtful discussions in class and have very positive relationships with both their peers and their teachers. These relationships, which are a strength of the school, help to ensure that there is a strong sense of community, and consequently instances of bullying are rare and students feel safe. Both in lessons and around the school, the behaviour of students is good. They have positive attitudes to learning and enjoy lessons, and this helps them to make good progress.

Occasionally, some students are allowed to be too passive in lessons, which restricts their participation and learning. Attendance is above average and has improved significantly in the sixth form. The school has a Healthy Schools award which reflects the commitment given to providing healthy meals and physical education in lessons as well as in extra-curricular activities. Students take responsibility for their own safety in practical lessons and are aware of the impact of their actions on the safety of others. Students have an effective voice through the school council system and are able to raise issues and resolve problems important to the student body, for example sheltered areas for lunch and the introduction of extra-curricular activities requested by students. They participate well in the community, for example by working with local primary schools as part of the school's specialist status and by raising funds for charity.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Most lessons are of high quality and are structured particularly well. These strengths have been developed through an extensive professional development strategy involving coaching and research-based models for teaching and learning which the school has adopted, as well as the performance management process. Here the school's role as training school has had a positive impact. Lesson objectives are shared systematically with students and generally progress towards them is evaluated; students are aware of their targets and most know what they need to do to improve. A small amount of teaching is insufficiently challenging, but in most cases it is challenging and students progress well in response. For example, in an English lesson, students worked at a range of demanding tasks, suitably supported by collaborative working and carefully constructed resource materials; in a geography lesson, the teacher displayed excellent subject knowledge and effortless classroom management skills, making use of a range of activities that engaged students and provided a high level of challenge. There are many good opportunities for independent learning where students manage their time well, support each other in their understanding and give mutual encouragement. Good relationships and behaviour support risk-taking and many teachers inspire confidence with their enthusiasm and subject expertise, as in a dance lesson where students spoke of the 'buzz' they received from the class.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school has recently introduced improved planning for matching curricular routes even more closely to students' aptitudes and abilities. This has partly been enabled by strong developments in vocational and applied courses for students aged 14 to 19 which are leading to better achievement. A carefully focused plan is in place to ensure the sustainability of these developments. For students aged 11, a transition project has been developed to bridge the primary and secondary phase. Students are finding this exciting and engaging, but the impact on achievement is yet to be established. Further, personalised learning is supported through catch-up programmes in Year 7 for students who failed to meet nationally expected standards in primary school, and is also developing through the school's virtual learning environment, the E-Zone. Students speak enthusiastically of the wealth of extra-curricular and study support opportunities that are available to them, most recently Bollywood dancing. Large numbers attend the school's homework club, particularly in Years 7 to 10.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Strong and effective relationships are an outstanding feature of the school and enable staff to know students well and ensure that individuals are able to reach their potential. Many parents of Year 7 students commented on how welcoming the school is and how easily their daughters had settled into this very large school. Excellent systems have been designed and implemented to ensure that the academic and pastoral progress of each student is very effectively monitored and reviewed. The integrated nature of these systems has resulted in improved progress and attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 for all students. Impressively, these systems allow staff, students and parents electronic access to essential data and information, so parents, for example, are able to access information about their child's attendance and progress via a secure website. As one parent noted, 'The school's website is easy to use and clear.' The school has robust procedures in place to ensure that students are safeguarded and that their health and safety are secured. They utilise a wide range of internal and external resources to support students experiencing behavioural difficulties and as a result, in the last academic year the number of students excluded from this very large school of over 1,700 students was zero. Provision for developing students' work-related skills is good, with access to enterprise activities across the curriculum, work experience and support for those whose literacy and numeracy skills require further improvement.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

In this very large school, the direction given by the headteacher is excellent. The commitment and support provided by the restructured and enlarged leadership team are helping her to drive school improvement. The improved leadership at middle manager level is ensuring that the excellent monitoring system is implemented effectively across the school. Core subject leaders are fully accountable for performance in their areas and are trained well to identify underachievement and underperformance.

While excellent monitoring systems are in place to track students' progress and to intervene as appropriate, systems for monitoring and evaluating access to, and the impact of, extra-curricular activities, enterprise education and work-related learning and the impact of some highly individualised curricular routes are still being refined.

Managers at all levels have a very thorough knowledge of school strengths and weaknesses and highly effective review and evaluation processes are in place, including subject self-evaluation. Supported by the setting of challenging targets, this has led to an impressive and successful strategy to raise achievement and standards that is holistic, rather than fragmented.

The very good professional development opportunities have ensured that teachers at all levels are enabled to actively use the tracking system to support students' progress. In addition, and as a result of its training school status, many teachers have mentoring and coaching skills that allow them to support colleagues both within and between curricular areas.

An inclusive and cohesive learning environment has been created in this very large and ethnically diverse school as a result of the positive way in which equality of opportunity and community cohesion are promoted. Governors are highly committed to the school and play a valuable role

as critical partners. The school deploys its resources very effectively to ensure that the learning environment for students is welcoming and there is good value for money. All safeguarding requirements are in place.

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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?	2	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	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	2	2

Achievement and standards

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

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?	2	2
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	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
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	2	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of 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?	1	1

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	2
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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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	

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

Dear Students

Inspection of Swanshurst School, Birmingham, West Midlands B13 0TW

Thank you very much for the enthusiastic, charming and sometimes humorous way you responded to the inspectors during our recent visit to your school.

As so many of you told us, Swanshurst is a good school. You enjoy your time at Swanshurst, feel very committed to it and gain many opportunities to broaden your experience as a result of attending it. We judged that you felt safe at school and were being encouraged to live healthy lifestyles. The fact that no one has been excluded, and that bullying is a rare occurrence that is dealt with severely, is very encouraging. We know you make positive contributions to the community, whether in school, in the local community or on a more global scale in terms of your work for the victims of the recent Pakistani earthquake. The school does much to improve your future economic well-being, in terms of work experience and improved levels of confidence and leadership skills.

We note that results at all key stages improved substantially in 2008. This is the result of improvements that have been made to teaching and learning, to the curriculum that is offered to you, and of course to your own hardwork. The headteacher, with the help of her senior and middle management teams and all the teachers and staff of the school, have implemented processes and systems to ensure that all of you are well supported. This applies to the main school and the sixth form. We know that there are excellent monitoring systems in place to ensure that if you are making less progress than expected, the school will be able to identify this and introduce strategies that will help you to get back on track.

In spite of the evident improvements, some teaching is not yet of the highest quality, so we have asked the school to ensure that in all lessons you are sufficiently challenged so that you make good progress. To help with this, we ask you to continue to attend school regularly, to continue to behave well and to work as hard as you can.

Best wishes

Gwen Coates Her Majesty's Inspector