

Swinton Community School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	106959
Local Authority	Rotherham
Inspection number	324497
Inspection dates	21–22 January 2009
Reporting inspector	John Rutherford 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)	1084
Sixth form	195
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr L Hall
Headteacher	Mr D Shevill
Date of previous school inspection	28 September 2005
School address	East Avenue Swinton Mexborough South Yorkshire S64 8JW
Telephone number	01709 570 586
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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

The school is of similar size to most secondary schools and serves an area of below average social and economic circumstances. A very low proportion of students are from minority ethnic backgrounds or have English as an additional language. A higher than average proportion of students has a learning difficulty and/or disability. The school includes a resource for 21 students who have autistic spectrum disorder. Swinton has collaborated with a small group of schools in the area to form an off-site behaviour support unit known as St Mary's Centre.

The school has had specialist school status for mathematics and computing since 2003. It has received the following awards: Advanced Healthy Schools Status, Business and Enterprise Award, Microsoft Academy Status, Careers Quality Award and Investors in People.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The school provides a satisfactory quality of education and this judgement is in line with the leadership team's self-evaluation. Senior leaders have a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in the school and they are determined to raise standards, which have fluctuated between average and below average for a number of years. To bring this about, they have introduced significant changes to the leadership team. As a result, leadership at senior and middle levels is now more effective and this is bringing about improvement in students' achievement, however the pace of improvement is slow. This is because members of the leadership team are working assiduously to make changes, but they are not systematically evaluating the impact of their work on students' progress to identify where their actions need to be concentrated.

Students joining the school have broadly average attainment, although a significant number have below average literacy skills. The majority make satisfactory progress and, in 2008, standards rose so that at the end of Key Stage 4 they were broadly average. School data show that standards in Key Stage 3 also improved, but to a lesser extent. In the sixth form, standards are broadly average, although there is some variability between subjects. The slow pace in improving standards is linked to a slow rate in raising the quality of teaching. This was judged as satisfactory in the previous inspection and, overall, it remains so. Although teaching was judged to be good or better in a significant minority of lessons seen during this inspection, this is not enough to accelerate students' progress to a good pace.

The curriculum is good and is well matched to the needs of students in Key Stages 3 and 4. Partnership with schools in many other countries is a significant strength and provides students with opportunities to learn about a wide range of cultures. Specialist school status makes a satisfactory contribution to the quality of provision and students' outcomes. The pastoral care for students is good, which helps them to feel safe and to enjoy school. Students' attendance has recently improved rapidly from a very low level and it is now close to the national average. Academic guidance for students is satisfactory. Students are clear about their end-of-year targets and how much progress they have made towards them. However, they are less clear about the next short steps that they need to take to improve their work. Similarly, teachers have not got a method for assessing the small steps of progress made by students who have a less serious learning difficulty and/or disability. This makes target setting for these students difficult and so inhibits their progress. Students with more significant needs, including those with autistic spectrum disorder, make good progress because of the quality of support they receive.

Governors make a good contribution to the leadership and management of the school, providing a strong balance of support and challenge. The majority of parents who returned the inspection questionnaire are fully supportive of the school. Of those who expressed some dissatisfaction, most identified students' behaviour as a problem. The inspection evidence indicates that this problem is with a small minority of students and the school, well supported by the governing body, is taking effective steps to tackle it.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The quality of education in the sixth form is satisfactory. Students make satisfactory progress to reach standards which, overall, are in line with the national average by the time they leave school. They make better progress in their second year than in the first, and their achievement is good in business studies, geography, physics, sociology and general studies. However, as was reported in the previous inspection, sixth form achievement remains too variable and it is no better than satisfactory in English, mathematics, biology, chemistry and modern languages.

Teaching and learning is satisfactory overall but also varies in quality. It is good in lessons where teachers provide regular opportunities for students to discuss, to learn independently and to develop their thinking through stimulating, problem-solving tasks. In other lessons, however, learning is over-directed by teachers and students have fewer occasions to reflect and interpret for themselves the information they are given. Arrangements for monitoring the quality of teaching and learning lack the rigour needed to ensure all lessons are of good quality.

Most students enjoy being in the sixth form and attend well. They say that, 'Teachers are helpful and value us as individuals.' and consider that they are well prepared for higher education, training or the world of work. Positive relationships and a good range of enrichment and extra-curricular activities effectively enhance students' personal development. There are effective procedures to track students' progress. Individual progress reviews and one to one mentoring help many students to feel confident and to achieve their goals. However, the range of courses on offer does not provide sufficient breadth to meet the needs of all students, particularly those with more vocational aspirations.

Leadership and management of the sixth form are satisfactory. Leaders have a clear understanding of the aspects of provision and students' outcomes that must be improved further, but their actions have not yet secured the necessary improvements.

What the school should do to improve further

Improve achievement and standards with greater urgency by:

- strengthening the focus of leaders on evaluating and improving students' progress across the school
- increasing the proportion of good or better learning and teaching
- more effectively identifying the next short steps of learning for students, including those with a learning difficulty and/or disability.

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

Students' achievement is satisfactory. Attainment on entry is broadly average and students leave Year 11 with standards that are also broadly average. Around a fifth of students starting the school are provided with additional support to improve their literacy skills. This group makes good progress to catch up. Higher attaining students make satisfactory progress.

The previous inspection in 2005 judged standards to be satisfactory but noted variability from year-to-year. The school has been slow to tackle this inconsistency and the proportion of students gaining five GCSE grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, at the end of Key Stage 4 declined in 2006 and 2007. However, this measure rose sharply in 2008 and inspection evidence indicates that the improvement is now being sustained and the school is on track for a further substantial rise in 2009. The greatest improvement has been in English, where standards were well below mathematics in 2007 and a cause for concern. The improvement in English has been helped by enhanced staffing and effective use of local authority support.

Standards at the end of Key Stage 3 also declined after being judged satisfactory in the previous inspection. In the last year, the school has halted the decline and there is improvement in English and in the specialist subject areas of mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT). The school exceeded its specialist subject targets for ICT and fell just short in mathematics. The rate of improvement is slow because the progress of students has not been monitored sufficiently closely to identify promptly areas where it needs to be accelerated.

Students with a learning difficulty and/or disability make satisfactory progress overall. However, those with less complex learning difficulties are making progress at a slower rate than those receiving much more intensive support. This is because methods for assessing their achievement have not been sufficiently adapted to enable all teachers to set specific short-term objectives.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

The personal development and well-being of students, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is satisfactory. Students report that they enjoy school. Their attendance is close to the national average and the majority show good attitudes to work. A small minority of students do not behave well and, although the school is taking effective action to tackle this, records show that a small number of lessons are still being disrupted. Students say they feel safe in school and do not see bullying as a major concern. They know who to go to with any worries.

Students understand the importance of good food and exercise for a healthy lifestyle. Through their school council, they have campaigned successfully for healthier lunches and increasing numbers are now taking advantage of these. Many benefit from the wide range of physical activities provided during the school day and in extra-curricular clubs. Older students gain skills in making a positive contribution by supporting younger learners in their own school and nearby primary schools. All students learn to contribute to the wider society through a well organised whole-school approach to supporting charities.

Students broaden their understanding of cultures and societies, very different to their own, through a wide range of partnership activities with schools in China, India, Sweden and many other countries. With their developing personal qualities, their vocational work and their improving standards in literacy, numeracy and ICT, students are adequately prepared for their economic well-being after school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall. There is good and outstanding teaching, but this is not consistent enough across the school to raise standards quickly. A strong feature of the more effective lessons is a clear focus on what the learner is achieving as opposed to what the teacher is doing. Teachers ensure that students are engaged in interesting activities, responding enthusiastically and making good progress. Teachers use assessment effectively to plan activities at the right level of challenge and to check regularly that students understand the work. The teaching style is stimulating and students are given regular opportunities to consolidate their understanding through discussion and practical activity. Teachers keep students thoroughly informed about the level they are working at and how much progress they have made towards their targets. However, they do not always give clear guidance on what is required for the next short steps of progress.

In less effective lessons, students' progress is no better than satisfactory because the work is not always challenging or interesting. There is too much direction by the teacher and too little opportunity for students to contribute or to learn independently.

The quality of marking overall is inconsistent. Some good practice exists where students receive regular and helpful feedback on their work, with very clear guidance on how to improve. However, in other cases, the feedback to students is not frequent or detailed enough to help them to make better progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The quality of the curriculum is good and is making a positive difference to students' achievement, attendance and attitudes to work. In Key Stage 4, the school is working with many local partners to provide courses and options to meet the different needs and interests of all students. Higher attaining students follow a full programme of examination courses, which they can extend to advanced study both within the school and through links with local colleges. At the same time, the curriculum provides opportunities for successful learning to students at risk of underachieving and disaffection. There is good provision for literacy and numeracy, including additional support for those students who require it. Students have access to a good selection of vocational courses and off-site learning in colleges and work placements, which increases their opportunities for employment and training after the age of 16. The proportion of students leaving Year 11 who are in employment, education or training is increasing and is higher than the national average.

The school has recently introduced an integrated studies curriculum into Key Stage 3 which links together different subjects in creative ways. Not enough time has elapsed to identify a positive impact on students' achievement, but it has improved their attitudes to learning.

The curriculum is enriched by a good range of popular extra-curricular activities, especially in sport, music and drama. There is a very well planned programme of visits abroad which makes an effective contribution to community cohesion by helping students to develop their understanding of a variety of international communities. The school recognises that more needs to be done to promote students' awareness of British communities other than their own.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The school provides good pastoral support for its students, including those with social and emotional difficulties and those with a complex learning difficulty and/or disability. The work of the year managers ensures that all students have someone to turn to at any time during the school day. Child protection procedures are robust and safeguarding arrangements meet the government's requirements. Partnerships with external support services are constructive. Induction procedures for new students are very effective and ensure that they settle quickly. The school provides good support for vulnerable and disaffected students in its inclusion and achievement centres and very good support in the off-site St Mary's Centre. Key members of staff in these centres understand the students' needs well and how to meet them. They are beginning to have a significant impact in reducing undesirable behaviour in school. The support for students with a learning difficulty and/or disability is generally satisfactory and it is good for those with autistic spectrum disorder.

Academic guidance and support are satisfactory. All students are given suitable long-term targets and they receive clear and regular information about how far they have gone towards meeting them. However, many are unclear about precisely what they need to do in the short-term to improve further. This is especially the case for students with a less complex learning difficulty. Form tutor time is not used effectively to provide guidance and support to students. Older students receive good advice when making choices regarding the subjects that they want to study in Years 10 and 11, then later in the sixth form. Students who leave school at the end of Year 11 also receive good quality advice about continuing their learning elsewhere or choosing a career.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Senior and middle leaders are united in their commitment to raise standards across the school by improving the quality of teaching and the curriculum. Rising standards at the end of Key Stage 4 demonstrate that they have a satisfactory capacity to bring about these improvements, although this needs to happen with much greater urgency.

The slow pace of improvement is largely due to leaders and teachers not giving enough attention to evaluating the impact of their work on accelerating students' progress. An example of this is the recently revised school development plan. It provides a sharp focus on the key areas for improvement and a clear process for senior leaders and governors to monitor its implementation. However, it is less effective in enabling the impact of new approaches to be evaluated in terms of improvement in students' progress. Similarly, although teaching is systematically monitored and leaders have a broadly accurate evaluation of the quality of teaching across the school, lesson observations focus on what the teacher is doing rather than on what and how the students are learning.

Governors make a good contribution to the leadership and management of the school. They have a detailed understanding of the main strengths and weaknesses and they provide strong challenge to senior and middle leaders. At the same time they are very supportive of the school, for example by teaching students about services in their local community and by helping to organise activities for overseas students visiting the school.

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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?	3	3
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?	3	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3	3

Achievement and standards

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

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	2	
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?	3	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?	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	3	
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	3	
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**

Thank you very much for your cooperation when I came to inspect your school with my colleagues. You gave us much valuable information which I considered carefully when writing my report. I would like to summarise my judgements for you.

Your school provides you with a satisfactory quality of education and helps you to achieve broadly average standards by the time you leave school. Adults provide good care and support for you and you have cooperated well with them to improve attendance and behaviour. I found you very polite and helpful and eager to take advantage of all the school has to offer. Most of you worked really hard in lessons, especially in those where I saw stimulating teaching. Your curriculum provides you with good opportunities to develop your own interests and talents and most of you have a clear understanding of your goals. The extra-curricular programme of activities and partnerships with schools abroad enrich the life of your school.

Your school is improving and your standards are rising slowly. We have recommended that the pace of improvement is increased and, to bring this about, we have agreed with school leaders and governors three areas to concentrate on:

- monitoring more systematically the rate of progress of all students and introducing improvements where your progress most needs to be improved
- increasing the amount of good and outstanding teaching and, at the same time, ensuring that this is helping you to learn more effectively and achieve more
- improving guidance to you on the next short steps of learning towards meeting your longer term targets.

An important aspect of these areas for improvement is that you are given more opportunity to develop independent learning skills so that you can rely less on being directed by adults. I am confident that you will take full advantage of this opportunity.