

Swalcliffe Park School Trust

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123331
Local Authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	327882
Inspection date	8 October 2008
Reporting inspector	James Bowden

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

Boarding provision	
Social care URN	
Social care inspector	Clare Davies

The inspection of social care was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

Type of school	Special
School category	Non-maintained
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number on roll	
School (total)	49
Sixth form	4
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Catherine Hutton
Headteacher	Mr Gareth Lewis
Date of previous school inspection	8 November 2005
School address	Swalcliffe Banbury OX15 5EP
Telephone number	01295 780302
Fax number	01295 780006

Age group	11–19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector and a Care Inspector.

Description of the school

Swalcliffe Park School is a non-maintained charitable trust, which stands in extensive grounds in a small country village. There are six residential units in the school, which provide full-time residential education and care for up to 57 students. Currently, four are day students. Most are of white British origin and a very small number are from minority ethnic groups. None are at the early stages of learning English. Almost all students are from a wide range of other English counties. Five are looked after by their respective local authorities. The headteacher is responsible for both care and education in the school.

All students have statements of special educational needs for social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Currently, two-thirds are within the Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD), with a significant number with Asperger syndrome (AS). A significant number have combined or multiple diagnosis of needs, including attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), Tourettes syndrome, and speech and language delay.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This outstandingly successful school develops each student's potential in a happy, secure and supportive environment. It meets fully its core aim of providing child-centred, non-confrontational, integrated care and education. The headteacher leads the school highly effectively and along with his senior team, sets a very clear direction and sense of purpose with a continuing focus on improvement. A further strength is the highly collaborative approach of the multi-disciplinary staff involved. These include specialist subject teachers, learning support assistants (LSAs), care staff, speech and language therapists, a consultant psychologist, a school counsellor and administrative staff. There is a strong culture of communication, collaboration and cooperation between home and school, which starts from the students' very first visit. The overwhelming majority of parents are supportive of the work of the school. One, expressing the sentiments of many others, commented, 'The way the staff have worked as a team to help my very troubled son to settle in has been amazing.'

Achievement across the school is outstanding because of the total care and education package it offers. Students' standards on entry are well below what is expected for their ages. However, the progress they make in relation to their starting points is excellent. Though standards remain low at the end of Year 9 compared to the national benchmark, all students make significant progress in developing their literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills and some achieve success in the National tests. At the end of Year 11, all students achieve accreditation in either GCSE or in a range of other academic or vocational courses. Those who remain at the school to follow courses in the sixth form achieve high levels of success in their personalised learning programmes, enabling them to progress to either further education or worked-based training.

Students' personal development and well-being are outstanding. Many have had a negative experience of education before arriving at Swalcliffe. However, because of a carefully planned induction programme and the individual support they receive, students improve their self-esteem and independence and learn to interact positively with one another and the adults they work with. This successfully rekindles their interest in, and enjoyment of, education. In a Key Stage 3 life skills lesson, students worked successfully together making cakes for their cake sale to raise money for an outing. Others worked very purposefully in an ICT room to produce posters for the sale. Afterwards, at morning break, they set up a stall outside to sell the cakes to staff and students, offering a discount for bulk buying! Students' behaviour, which for some can be difficult when they join the school, improves considerably and is good overall.

Teaching and learning are outstanding because teachers plan their lessons to ensure that the individual needs of all students are met. This results in a highly effective ethos for learning, which is underpinned further by very strong working relationships between teachers, other adults and students. An older student commented, 'Teachers are very supportive and helpful and they know what our learning needs are'. The curriculum is outstanding because it meets fully the needs of all students, enables them to achieve academic success and contributes significantly to their personal development. There is a very impressive range of enrichment activities both within the school and off-site that broaden students' curriculum experience. High quality care, guidance and support for students is particularly effective because it supports each individual in very specific ways and ensures all are looked after in a safe, healthy and caring environment. The dedication, enthusiasm and commitment of all staff in working with students underpin this aspect of the school's provision.

Leadership and management are outstanding at all levels. Rigorous self-evaluation has resulted in very well focused development planning, ensuring the school has continued to improve and develop further since the last inspection. Robust monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning has been used to identify and share good practice, particularly in relation to working with the increasing number of ASD students. The need for further training for all staff in working with ASD students has been recognised as an area for improvement by the school. There is excellent liaison and collaboration between all staff, which ensures that every student really does matter and, therefore, makes excellent progress. Despite its isolated setting, the school does all it can to promote community cohesion – involving students in the local and wider community and having the local community support the curriculum. Governance is particularly effective and focused.

In the light of the improvements and developments since the last inspection, the clear direction set for further improvement and continuing success in enabling students to make excellent progress, the school has excellent capacity to improve even further.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

Sixth form provision continues to be outstanding. Although standards are below those expected for their age because of their special needs, the small numbers who receive local authority funding to stay on make excellent progress. Some achieve further success by moving on to GCSE and vocational courses, building on their previous success in the main school. Individualised learning programmes and part-time placements at a local further education college enhance the considerable improvements students make in their independence and social skills. One commented, 'We have our own flat and take turns in cooking for each other'. Another commented that they felt trusted, being allowed to catch the local bus to Banbury on Saturday mornings. Teaching is highly effective and meets fully students' needs and aspirations for the future. The curriculum, including an excellent range of enrichment and preparation for life activities, is also outstanding in this respect. Very high quality care, guidance and support promote students' academic and personal development really well. Leadership and management are outstanding with a clear direction and purpose, including at whole school level, to promote high quality provision and improve students' life chances.

Effectiveness of boarding provision

Grade: 1

The quality of the boarding provision is outstanding as dedicated staff ensure students feel safe and have fun whilst learning. All but one of the National Minimum Standards has been met with one recommendation, a significant number have been exceeded. Students' health needs are managed very well with clear policies and secure storage of medication. Parental wishes and consent are sought for staff to administer medication and first aid. Students are well cared for when they are ill. The health and well-being of students is promoted by staff through physical exercise and a balanced diet.

Healthy menus are generally appreciated by students. Many students like the food and have seen an improvement, however the non-meat options are limited. Food technology is popular and provides students with a greater understanding of healthy eating. Student involvement with the preparation and cooking of food supports them in extending their range of food selection, where they may have a limited diet due to their autism. The school council took the decision to ban fizzy drinks.

Students feel safe and are clear on boundaries within the school and their personal behaviour. There are low levels of bullying and students feel confident that staff will 'sort it out' when reported. Students are supported in addressing any behavioural difficulties they may have and receive clear and consistent responses from staff. Behaviour incentive schemes are well received by students and considered fair. One student said he liked it that if he had a difficult morning he could try and turn it around in the afternoon and that this would be noticed and rewarded. Staff are trained to manage and respond to challenging behaviour and comprehensive records are maintained.

Good safeguarding procedures exist throughout the school. All staff are briefed on how to report any concerns and have a personal copy of the safeguarding policy. The senior management team work well with the local authority safeguarding team and attend external training events with them. Senior staff have attended training on safer recruitment practices and this is reflected in the robust recruitment procedure adopted by the school. The open culture encourages students to express their views and raise any issues. Student complaint forms are readily available to be completed alone or with staff support. Contact helplines are advertised in the residential units, the independent visitor attends the school at least twice a month and is available by telephone. Health and safety issues are taken very seriously with robust policies and procedures in place. Designated staff are responsible for ensuring the safety of the site and all staff receive relevant training. Safety matters are reinforced with students through lessons, activities, fire drills, use of school transport and the school code of conduct.

A strength of the school is the enjoyment and achievement of the students. The range of activities is enjoyed and appreciated by the students, who recognise that they are given opportunities to try new things. Trips are frequently arranged further afield. Staff have undertaken specific training to become qualified instructors to support activities such as sailing and climbing. Some students are encouraged and supported to join local sports clubs in the community. The residential provision supports the educational progress of students by working closely with teaching staff, promoting homework, encouraging and assisting with access to computers and the library.

Each student is encouraged to reach their potential and enjoy the same rights and opportunities as other young people, with support from staff. Equality and diversity is promoted by celebrating difference and learning about religious festivals and customs from a variety of faiths and ethnic groups. Students are involved with a community football campaign called 'Show racism the red card'.

Strong relationships exist between students and staff, with mutual respect. The students feel fairly treated and are able to approach staff with concerns or personal problems. Two students said that previous schools had not been pleasant experiences but Swalcliffe Park School has helped them to work in class and enjoy school. Transition periods are managed well between school and residential staff, these have changed in response to suggestions made by the school council. Student consultation is an integral part of the development of the school. This occurs formally through student council, surveys, tutor groups, residential groups and through their annual reviews.

A thorough assessment process prior to placement contributes to ensuring that the individual needs of students are met within the boarding environment. New students receive a handbook that former students have contributed to, 'the things they would have liked to have known before their arrival'. Pay phones allow students to maintain contact with parents.

Good boarding accommodation offers students a single room or designated space within a shared room. The accommodation provides appropriate levels of privacy and is suitable for the needs of the students. All meals are taken in residential units to promote group living. Students respect their surroundings and are generally well behaved. The commitment and enthusiasm of the staff are strengths of the school. Staff benefit from an excellent training programme, which is evident in their work. The new senior management team have a clear vision for the development of the school and have identified areas to address to enhance further their provision. They effectively monitor the welfare of students. Representatives of the governing body regularly visit the residential units recording the areas that they have looked at. However, these written reports do not fully meet the monitoring requirements.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop further the knowledge and expertise of all staff in order to improve further their effectiveness in meeting the needs of the increasing number of ASD students.
- Ensure that the governing body produce a monitoring report (NMS 33).

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

The school's analysis of data shows a sustained trend in improving achievement within a context of increasingly complex needs. In Year 9, attainment levels in the National tests were in line with national age-related expectations, whilst other students achieved the aspirational targets set by the school. Compared with similar schools nationally, GCSE results place the school in the top five per cent for the past five years. In 2008, four students followed a full GCSE programme. Other students successfully pass entry-level examinations and other accreditation such as the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) courses.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Students flourish because of the supportive ethos of the school. An older student commented, 'The teachers and care staff have helped me grow up over a number of years'. They understand the importance of healthy exercise and living, taking part enthusiastically in a wide range of physical activities throughout the year. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural aspects of students' personal development are outstanding and are celebrated throughout the building with excellent quality display of their work and activities in which they have been involved. They take an active part in the life of the school through involvement in the school council and local community projects and raise money for a range of charities. Students' appetite for learning improves and this, along with their progress in the key skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT eases their transition to the next stage of their career.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Teaching is particularly effective because staff know their students really well and have a calm and supportive approach to encouraging their learning. In a Year 11 morning tutor session, where students were reading a weekly newspaper, the LSA handled very sensitively one student's concerns about the impact of the experiments being carried out in Switzerland with the Hadron

Collider. Activities are appropriate and enable students to make progress towards the targets set in their individual education plans (IEPs). Effort and achievement are constantly rewarded. Oral praise and encouragement were used extremely effectively in a Year 10 art lesson where students were working independently in applying various collage materials to add colour and texture to a 'natural form' picture. This motivated them very well and they were clearly proud of their achievements.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is very effective in rekindling students' interest in learning as well as improving their skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT. It is also very effective in developing their personal skills and attributes, which enables them to make excellent progress towards their academic and personal targets. This ensures they are well prepared for the next stage of their career. Students are particularly appreciative of the whole range of activities they can join in as part of the school's 24-hour provision throughout the whole week. The high quality range of accommodation, including extensive grounds, enhances greatly the quality of provision and education they receive.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school provides an exceptionally strong, collaborative, caring and supportive environment where students feel safe, develop their personal qualities and achieve academic success. Students' achievement and well-being are at the forefront of the school's ethos of care and education. Highly effective working relationships with those funding placements and a wide range of other specialist agencies and professionals contribute extensively. Unauthorised absence is not an issue at the school. Very effective procedures enable the school to track students' academic and personal progress, the enhanced role of key worker contributes to the effectiveness of this.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Highly effective transition planning enabled the headteacher to take over successfully the reins of leadership, restructure the senior leadership team and to clarify what the school needed to do to improve further. There is no complacency. The school is well aware of its current strengths and areas for development, particularly in relation to whole staff training to improve the school's effectiveness in addressing fully the needs of the increasing number of ASD students. Staff are highly committed to the school, minimal turnover being indicative of this, and appreciate the opportunities they have for continuing professional development. The governing body is highly effective in its role as a supportive friend of 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?	1	1
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?	1	1
The effectiveness of boarding provision	1	
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1

Achievement and standards

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

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?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	1	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	1	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	1
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?	1	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
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**

20 October 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Swalcliffe Park School Trust, Banbury, OX15 5EP

My colleague and I visited your school over a two-day period. I spent one day there, seeing you in lessons and in other activities. I also chatted to some of you. My colleague visited the boarding units the day before I arrived. She chatted to you and the staff, as well as joining some of you for your evening meal in Willow house. She then joined some of you in 'the den' and saw how enthusiastic you were playing 'Warhammer'. We were both impressed by the friendly way you greeted us and the open way in which you chatted with us. We were also pleased to hear how you enjoy the extra activities you can join in, and the care and support you receive. We were particularly impressed with how happy you are at Swalcliffe and your sense of humour in explaining this! We also know that your parents are very pleased with the progress you make.

Swalcliffe is an outstanding school. This is because:

- the headteacher and his senior staff lead the school and the boarding provision really well
- during your time there you make excellent progress in your learning and personal development
- all the adults who work with you make sure you are safe and extremely well cared for
- all the adults who work with you are really dedicated, have your best interests at heart and want to make sure you do well in the future
- teachers make sure lessons are well planned and interesting
- the curriculum and other activities make your education very interesting.

There are a couple of things the school could do to make things even better for you:

- ensure all staff have more training to understand the needs of ASD students
- make sure the governors produce the necessary monitoring report.

Once again, many thanks for making us feel so welcome and all the best for your future.

Yours sincerely

James Bowden

Lead Inspector