

Swadelands School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118793
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	339306
Inspection dates	3–4 March 2010
Reporting inspector	Alan Taylor-Bennett HMI

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

Type of school	Modern (non-selective)
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	789
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	102
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Justin Byrd
Headteacher	Richard Baddeley
Date of previous school inspection	3 December 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. Over half of the time was spent looking at learning, and 30 lessons and 29 teachers were observed. In addition, meetings were held with governors, local authority representatives, staff and groups of students. A wide range of documentation was scrutinised including the school's development plan, its self-review, analyses of the attainment and progress of its students, records of lesson observations, policies, and 56 parental questionnaires.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- the factors affecting trends in attainment across the school
- the degree of challenge in the targets set by the school and the role that target setting plays in driving improvement
- the impact of the school's work on raising attendance levels
- the care, guidance and support provided for students who may otherwise become disaffected with school and learning
- the role of the middle leaders in improving provision and obtaining better outcomes for students.

Information about the school

Swadelands School is a non-selective school serving Maidstone, Ashford and surrounding villages, an area in which there are schools that are selective and admit students on the basis of academic ability. It is a specialist sports college and its facilities are used extensively by the local community. There are more boys than girls in the school and comparatively few students are from minority ethnic backgrounds or speak English as an additional language. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is greater than the national average. The number of students who join or leave the school partway through their secondary education is larger than average. The school holds several national quality standards and awards including the Artsmark at Gold standard, and the Healthy Schools Award.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

- Swadelands School is providing a quality of education which is at least satisfactory in every respect. Some outcomes for students, and some aspects of provision, are good. In accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement.
- The leadership provided by the headteacher, his senior team and the governors is good. Their response to the need to improve outcomes and provision following the last inspection was concerted and effective and the school is now improving rapidly and has good capacity to sustain this improvement. Middle leaders drive improvement effectively and confidently, although their focus to date has been on provision rather than outcomes.
- Teaching is now securely satisfactory across all departments. The drive for improvement has secured some good practice in many areas, but the school has not yet identified clear, agreed criteria to promote outstanding teaching.
- Attainment is low but improving rapidly, and the progress made by students is satisfactory and improving securely. The school sets appropriately ambitious targets for students.
- Students feel safe in the school and thrive there, due to the good quality of care, guidance and support.
- The curriculum currently provides for the needs of learners throughout the school, and it is improving due to the introduction of a range of more vocational courses.
- The sixth form provides for the learning and personal development needs of students satisfactorily, but attainment is low.
- The school's specialism is being used very well and is making a significant contribution to securing better outcomes for all groups of students.
- Systems and procedures to secure the safeguarding of students are good.
- Several students each year perform significantly less well than expected due to personal circumstances, but the school has a range of effective strategies to support them.
- Attendance is low in Years 7 to 11 and in the sixth form. It is improving rapidly due to the steps taken by the school, but there are still some persistent absentees.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve attendance throughout the school, including the sixth form, to at least the national average by 2012, by:

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- working intensively with the minority of parents who do not send their children to school as often as they should, so that they appreciate the vital importance of high levels of attendance to their children's achievement and future economic well-being
- working closely with a range of outside agencies to support the families of students who are persistently absent and, when necessary, enforce the requirement for their children to be educated.
- Improve attainment in Key Stages 3 and 4 and in the sixth form so that it is at least in line with the national average by 2011 by:
 - motivating students to achieve more by recognising the progress they make in lessons explicitly in feedback and reporting processes
 - basing accountability more on the quality of outcomes.
- Raise the quality of teaching across all departments so that within three years it is consistently good with some practice that is outstanding by:
 - arriving at a shared understanding of what constitutes outstanding teaching in the school
 - adapting the strategies that have successfully improved teaching so far, so that they now foster excellent teaching
 - developing students' confidence in themselves as independent and self-motivated learners.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**3**

Students' enjoyment of their work is evident in many lessons and they are gaining confidence in their learning. Several older students made a point of saying to inspectors how much better they felt the quality of their learning had been over the last few years. Attainment was seen to be low in lessons and students' books but rising rapidly. Outstanding progress is rare and this is a reflection of what has been until now a necessary focus on establishing a satisfactory quality of learning for all, rather than employing a wide range of techniques to really push individuals in lessons. The school monitors the progress of vulnerable groups of students with particular care to ensure that they achieve in line with their peers.

Students feel that the school is a safe environment and they are confident that staff will respond effectively to any concerns. There are good relationships between students and staff in the school. Behaviour around the site is good and, although some students' behaviour is boisterous and lively they generally treat each other with respect. Behaviour in lessons supports satisfactory learning but the degree of active engagement in learning is not consistent. Despite concerns expressed by some parents, students are confident that their lifestyles reflect a good understanding of health issues. Their understanding of potential risks to their health and well-being is well developed. The sports specialism is a significant factor in this: over half of the students are actively involved in physical activities beyond the school day. Many develop a wide range of skills

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associated with these activities, often associated with their contributions to the school community and to the wider community. Many are sports leaders and they enjoy working with pupils in neighbouring primary schools and a local special school. A range of charities are supported keenly by students.

Students have a well-developed sense of right and wrong and value fairness and justice. They also have a sense of life beyond their immediate locality. Their understanding of multiculturalism and the spiritual aspects of their lives are satisfactory, and students usually respond enthusiastically to the limited opportunities presented to broaden their experiences of art, music and drama.

Students have confidence about points of transition, for example their preparation for moving into the sixth form or further education elsewhere, due to the good work of the school in enabling them to understand the range of choices available to them. In the lessons observed students applied their information and communication technology skills, and their relatively less well-developed literacy and numeracy skills, appropriately across a range of contexts. However, the attendance of a significant minority of students is too low. This causes these students to perform disappointingly in examinations at the end of Key Stage 4 and there is an adverse effect on their social development and preparation for working life.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	3
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	4
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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How effective is the provision?

Strategies to ensure consistent practice in teaching quality have proved successful, and the school is now well poised to consolidate these gains by making better use of assessment information to really challenge students in their learning. The sports specialism has made important contributions to improvements in teaching. The best lessons are purposeful, busy and fun, and they involve students in a range of learning activities that are well-matched to their interests and ability. Some outstanding aspects seen, for example in an English lesson on soliloquies, afforded insight to the potential of students to be excited by learning and to play a significant role in it. The contribution made by teaching assistants to the quality of learning in lessons is important but their effectiveness is sometimes limited by insufficient coordination between them and the teacher.

A useful range of qualifications at Key Stage 4, many piloted by the physical education department, offers students the opportunity to capitalise on their different learning styles and approaches to assessment. The courses designed for students who may otherwise become disaffected and stop coming to school are, for the most part, effective. Partnership work supports this well through, for example, the Key Stage 4 Engagement Project. The programme of early entry in some GCSE subjects is motivating for students and is a factor in the rapid improvement in the proportion who obtain good examination results. Although there is special provision for the significant proportion of students who have low literacy and numeracy skills, and low self-esteem as learners, the curriculum at Key Stage 3 is less well developed. There is a good range of enrichment and extension activities which centre around sports provision but also include eco-schools, mathematics games and a history club. A range of effective partnerships with other schools and higher education institutions provide for the needs of different groups of learners, for example gifted and talented students and those embarking on Diploma courses.

The school's systems to care for and support students are very effective. Student Services is well regarded by students: its staff and the heads of house work well with outside agencies to provide for the needs of students with particular problems in school or in their home lives. The Attitude to Learning monitoring programme and the associated competition have been particularly effective in improving outcomes. The programme of personal, social and health education develops students' awareness of the network of support available to them. Vertical tutor groups give opportunities for students to support each other across the age range; several younger students mentioned how valuable the mentoring system is and how much they look forward to playing their part in it when they are older. Good procedures to improve attendance are having an impact but are still not fully supported by all parents and carers.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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The quality of teaching Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher provides a vision for the school that is communicated clearly and effectively to staff and to students. He and his team show considerable commitment to obtaining the best outcomes for all groups of students, regardless of their background or level of ability. Commitment to promoting equality of opportunity is good. There is sense of clarity about how the school will provide for the specific needs of its students in the future 'they will be 'a small school realising big ambitions'. The school has a good understanding of its strengths and its development needs, including the required change in strategies to take the school up to the next level. Middle leaders have a strong grasp of their role in driving up standards, due to strong line management. They are held to account, although mainly for provision rather than outcomes, and they manage their teams well. The school has made good use of guidance from outside agencies, including the local authority.

The governing body is very well informed about the work of the school through its excellent programme of visits. This gives it the capacity to support and challenge the senior leadership of the school effectively. It works closely with the headteacher to ensure that safeguarding procedures are maintained to a good standard.

The school works effectively to secure the cooperation and active engagement of parents. Several now serve on the parents' forum and make important contributions to the school's development planning, although work in this respect is good due to its quality rather than the number of parents involved. Contributions to the social coherence of the local community are based on a good knowledge of need, but the activities undertaken are not included in the development planning structure, and this limits the school's capacity to evaluate and extend its work to promote community cohesion.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2

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The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Sixth form

Students enter and leave the sixth form with relatively low levels of attainment and make broadly satisfactory progress during their time there. Achievement in the vocational courses is better than in the more traditional GCE courses offered, and retention rates are low but improving. Systems to track the progress of individual students and match their needs and strengths to the types of courses they follow have improved this year. Students' personal development is good. They feel safe and show great loyalty to the sixth form and the school. Students are keen to take on responsibility, for example in the reading partnership scheme for Year 7 and in leading charity initiatives.

Teaching in sixth form lessons is at least satisfactory and is sometimes good. The best teaching takes advantage of the opportunities offered by small group size for providing individual support. There is a good range of courses available which attract many students to stay on into the sixth form. Care and guidance are satisfactory and sixth formers feel well supported. For example, the induction process is good and there is good support for supporting their aspirations, including obtaining university places. Systems to improve attendance are being improved through better monitoring and a faster response to absence, but it is still too low.

The quality of leadership and management has recently improved following the appointment of a head of sixth form and a strengthening of the line management arrangements. This is beginning to have an impact on provision and outcomes.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	3
The quality of provision in the sixth form	3
Leadership and management of the sixth form	3

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Views of parents and carers

The very large majority of parents and carers indicated that they are happy with their child's experiences at school. Positive comments included recognition of the quality of the support during the transition from primary school, the promptness of response to queries, the school's care for and knowledge of individuals, and the good quality of guidance and support. Concerns included the way that the school deals with unacceptable behaviour, the quality of teaching and the ways in which the school supports healthy lifestyles. In response, inspectors monitored behaviour and found that it was at least satisfactory in all respects and was improving, and gathered strong evidence that students have acquired a good understanding of healthy lifestyles in personal, social and health education and other subjects. The quality of teaching has now improved to securely satisfactory. The school seeks to show value for the views of parents and it has established mechanisms for gathering those views and acting on them. It showed genuine interest in the comments expressed in this relatively small return.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Swadelands School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 56 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 789 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	12	21	32	57	8	14	2	4
The school keeps my child safe	12	21	32	57	6	11	3	5
The school informs me about my child's progress	16	29	23	41	12	21	2	4
My child is making enough progress at this school	14	25	31	55	8	14	3	5
The teaching is good at this school	4	7	33	59	13	23	5	9
The school helps me to support my child's learning	6	11	29	52	17	30	3	5
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	9	16	22	39	19	34	2	4
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	10	18	32	57	9	16	3	5
The school meets my child's particular needs	9	16	35	63	10	18	2	4
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	8	14	26	46	13	23	5	9
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	9	16	39	52	8	14	5	9
The school is led and managed effectively	9	16	31	55	11	20	4	7
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	10	18	36	64	5	9	4	7

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
Type of school	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement. ■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils. ■ The quality of teaching. ■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships. ■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



5 March 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Swadelands School, Maidstone, ME17 2LL

You will recall that inspectors visited your school recently. On behalf of the team, I would like to thank you for the welcome you showed us and for the calm and positive way that many of you responded to our presence in the school. We enjoyed talking with many of you. Your contributions, along with what we saw when watching you learning in lessons, helped us to arrive at our judgements.

You are aware that in the previous inspection it was decided that the school needed to improve. I am delighted to say that it has, and that we found the quality of its work to be at least satisfactory in all respects, and good in some. You can read the full report on the website but I have provided some brief information here for you.

Teaching is now consistently satisfactory and this, with the good leadership in the school, has improved your achievement to satisfactory. The way you behave supports your learning, and the good care and support provided enable you to feel safe and to enjoy school. The better range of courses available to you at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form are providing for your needs well.

Your school has a good capacity to improve further. To support this I have asked the headteacher to address three things in particular.

- Some of you do not attend school often enough. This is true in the sixth form, too. This will significantly reduce your chances of doing well in examinations and gaining access to education, training and employment in the future, and attendance rates must improve.
- Attainment should be improved by supporting and celebrating the good progress needed for this to happen.
- The quality of teaching should be improved to be consistently good and there must be more that is outstanding. This will involve teachers agreeing a strategy to make this happen, and encouraging you to be better at steering your own learning at the same time.

You can help by coming to school as often as you possibly can, and playing an active part in every lesson. I wish you, and the school, every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Alan Taylor-Bennett

Her Majesty's Inspector

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