

Swindon Academy

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	135364
Local Authority	Not applicable
Inspection number	345503
Inspection dates	27–28 January 2010
Reporting inspector	John Kennedy HMI

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

Type of school	Academy
School category	Non-maintained
Age range of pupils	3–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1431
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	112
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sir Anthony Greener
Headteacher	Jan Shadick
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. The inspectors spent the majority of time observing learning. They visited 40 lessons and support sessions and observed 39 teachers. They observed two assemblies and a tutor period, and held meetings with members of the local governing body, the school improvement partner, staff, four groups of pupils and spoke with some parents. Inspectors observed the academy's work, and looked at its raising attainment plan, analyses of pupil's progress, safeguarding documentation and other policies and some of the pupils' work and records. They evaluated questionnaires from 93 parents, 68 staff and a representative sample from 109 pupils.

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

- the effectiveness of systems for assessment, monitoring and intervention for pupils who are underperforming, particularly in Key Stage 2 and in mathematics
- the impact of middle leaders in improving the quality of teaching and learning
- support for pupils with behavioural, emotional or social difficulties
- sixth form provision and its impact of students' outcomes.

Information about the school

Swindon Academy, sponsored by United Learning Trust, opened in September 2007. At that time it was formed from three predecessor schools, one secondary, one junior and one infant. In January 2009 an all through primary school joined the academy. It is central to the vision of Swindon Academy that it will be one school offering education for children and young people from 0 to 19. The academy is divided into three phases: foundation phase for pupils from Nursery to Year 3; the development stage for those in Years 4 to 8, and the extension phase for those in Year 9 to the end of the sixth form. The sixth form had low numbers in its first year and is growing steadily. The academy operates on two sites. New accommodation was completed on the Beech Avenue site in January 2010 and major refurbishment on the Alton Close site is due for completion this term.

Most of the pupils are of White British heritage, reflecting the composition of the local community. The proportion who speak English as an additional language is low. About half of the pupils have been identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities and this is well above that found nationally. Most of these have either moderate difficulties in learning or behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. The proportion who have a statement of special educational needs is also above average. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is well above average. The academy has a specialism in science with business and enterprise. Privately managed childcare provision is run on the academy site.

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

Swindon Academy is a satisfactory but rapidly improving school. Pupils echo this judgement, indicating that the academy is giving them 'a second chance'. One pupil commented, 'We used to be on the bottom of the pile but now we're going to be on the top.' The new building provides a wonderful learning environment.

Pupils feel safe and benefit from being at a caring academy where staff are committed to the vision of nurturing 'the best in everyone'. Staff are tackling a legacy of historical underachievement with success. This is because of the creative curriculum and positive climate for learning. Pupils commented on how they have noticed a very definite drive to raise standards. Systems to track pupils' progress are working well. This enables staff to intervene and provide targeted support for those who are falling behind. Teaching is improving and now has a number of strong features. The academy is well placed to spread good practice from within. However, the strengths in teaching are not yet consistent. Marking, for example, does not give pupils clear information as to how to improve, particularly less able pupils.

Standards, while below national averages, are improving and substantially so for those at the end of Key Stage 4. This steep improvement is on track to be sustained. The rate of progress is more pronounced in English and science than in mathematics. Attainment is low in Key Stage 2 because there has been considerable ground to make up and the rate of improvement was not as marked in 2009 as for older pupils. This is being tackled well and current data shows that pupils are now making accelerated progress across all year groups in the development phase. The academy is working diligently to sustain this improvement. Behaviour and attendance rates are improving but are not yet consistently good.

Children make good progress in Nursery and Reception. Strong links are made with parents, and children's learning and developmental needs are well met. However, outcomes were disappointing in the sixth form in 2009 and too many students made inadequate progress, partly because they were on unsuitable courses. This is being tackled with determination and the impact is evident in the progress of the current cohort. Sixth-formers can access a more appropriate curriculum and systems to track their progress have been sharpened. Consequently, almost all the students are on target to reach their predicted grades at the end of the year. Students are well supported and cared for, but aspects of careers guidance are not as good.

The extended leadership team sets clear direction for the academy and staff at all levels share a common determination to continually improve. Monitoring is thorough and underpins the comprehensive systems for self-evaluation. It ensures that staff have an

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accurate understanding of what they need to do to drive improvement. This, together with the significant improvements which the academy has made in the second year of its life, is at the heart of its good capacity to improve.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise standards by:
 - increasing the whole school focus on numeracy so that the progress of that pupils make in mathematics is on a par with English
 - ensuring that pupils make more rapid progress at Key Stage 2.
- Improve the quality of teaching by:
 - increasing the proportion of teaching that is consistently good
 - sharing good practice to support less secure teaching
 - ensuring greater consistency in the quality of feedback, particularly for the less able and in the use of assessment.
- Improve outcomes in the sixth form by:
 - developing more opportunities for independent learning
 - regularly reviewing the curriculum to ensure it is meeting students' needs and interests
 - improving the quality of guidance for students.
- About 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

The academy provides a place of learning where pupils are growing in their confidence as successful learners. Their enjoyment stems from the positive relationships they have with staff. Improvements in the quality of teaching and in the accommodation are matched by positive changes in pupils' attitudes to learning and their behaviour in most lessons. This is reflected in their better progress, and for many this is at some pace. However, progress is variable between year groups and subjects. There are no significant variations in the performance of any groups and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities make similar progress to their peers. Staff identified that pupils who were at the second school-based stage of the special educational needs process did not do as well as expected in 2009 and the steps they have taken to rectify this are having a positive impact.

Attainment is low at the end of Key Stages 2 and 4. However, the gap between the performance of pupils and their peers nationally is closing rapidly by the end of Key Stage 4. Every Key Stage 4 attainment indicator shows improvement in 2009 and, in some instances, the improvement is dramatic. The proportion, for instance, of pupils gaining five or more GCSE higher grades which include English and mathematics almost

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trebled in 2009. Standards in science have risen significantly and are above average. This steep rise is on track to be sustained this year. A policy of encouraging pupils to take some of their exams early is raising their aspirations and achievement. Almost a quarter of the pupils in Year 11 have already secured a grade C in English and mathematics.

Although attainment is still low, the academy is successful in raising pupils' aspirations and in providing them with literacy and information and communication (ICT) skills. The development of numeracy skills is weaker. Pupils are growing in self-confidence and are now being given increasing opportunities to develop other competencies, for example, in leadership skills. Initiatives with partners such as the 'school of dreams' prepares them well for the world of work.

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	3
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	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

How effective is the provision?

Teaching is improving. Almost two thirds of the teaching observed was good, closely matching the academy's own evaluation. In most lessons, teachers' use of ICT provides an effective visual stimulus to learning. In better lessons, teachers plan well and provide

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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a stimulating range of activities well matched to what pupils already know and can do. Teachers talk the language of levels and pupils have a good idea of how they are doing. These lessons have a buzz about them as pupils participate enthusiastically. However there is a minority of lessons where teaching is satisfactory and a few where it is inadequate. In some lessons, pupils spend too much time listening and work does not fully challenge them. The quality of support from teaching assistants is variable: some are proactive and contribute effectively to pupils' learning, while others are too passive. Inspectors noted examples of good written feedback but this practice is not consistent. The broad curriculum is tailored well to meet pupils' needs, interests and abilities. This three phase curriculum, with its emphasis on flexibility between year groups, enables pupils to be where they want to be in order to learn. It also ensures a smooth transition between stages. The impact of the specialism can be seen in a strong emphasis on developing scientific enquiry as early as the foundation phase. It is also reflected in the specialist events which engender enthusiasm, such the Year 9 science day which took place during the inspection. Pupils are well served with a wide range of opportunities, including through extra-curricular activities, to take part in sport and express themselves in the creative arts. Individualised and group programmes cater well for those with special education needs and the gifted and talented, and have a positive impact on their learning. Those who speak English as an additional language are satisfactorily provided for but this is not as well developed.

Pastoral care systems are strong and the most vulnerable receive timely support. Staff can target interventions for groups and individuals because they know their individual needs well and there are good structures in place to support those whose learning falls behind. Effective systems for managing behaviour and attendance are having an impact on reduction in persistent absenteeism and low exclusions. Parents welcome the family learning activities that are on offer and its impact is being translated into positive learning outcomes for their children.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

How effective are leadership and management?

The academy is well led by the Principal and her extended leadership team. Their ambition, drive and vision are outstanding and contagious. They are supported well by the local governing body, an increasingly good group of middle managers and a team of enthusiastic staff who are committed to continuous professional development.

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Monitoring is thorough. Staff are challenged and support in equal measure to improve their practice and this is evident in the effective management of teaching and learning. High expectations and ambitious targets are set for staff and pupils alike.

Staff take their child protection responsibilities seriously and give priority to ensuring that the most vulnerable are safeguarded. They receive appropriate and regular child protection training. The attention given to the performance of groups and individuals and the rapid closing of any gaps in performance exemplifies the commitment to equalities. The academy is a cohesive community and is spreading its influence more locally although the impact of some of this wider working has not yet been fully realised.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
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	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Early Years Foundation Stage

Many children join with skills and development which are well below expectations for their age, for instance in physical, speech and language development, social skills and in numeracy. Children respond well to their stimulating environment, the quality of relationships they have with staff and the care they receive. Careful planning can be seen in the children's detailed 'learning journey' records which staff use well to identify the next learning and development steps. Strong links with parents enable them to contribute to these assessments and observations. Staff identify children with special educational needs early and ensure that appropriate support is put in place. As a consequence, children of abilities make good progress in their learning, for example in their personal, social and emotional development. There is a good, planned balance of indoor and outdoor activities. However, because of temporary building work on the

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Alton Close site, children have more limited use of the outdoor area. Transition between Nursery, Reception and Year 1 is smooth. Leaders work closely between the two sites to share good practice and ensure that systems are consistent.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Sixth form

Sixth form students are making satisfactory progress given their starting points. Some are making good progress and on course to do very well. In most lessons, students have good opportunities for independent work and they are encouraged to be reflective thinkers. However, at times there is too much teacher talk. Some students are lacking in confidence but are encouraged well and receive good support. Behaviour is outstanding in many lessons and this reflects students' eagerness to get on with their learning. The academy curriculum now offers a much better match to students' aspirations and abilities. Consequently, students are making much better progress and they feel that they can succeed. Attendance and retention rates are high. Systems for tracking progress have improved and, as a result, students have a good understanding of their progress. However, some students indicated that careers guidance could be improved and inspectors agree. Leaders and managers have taken decisive steps to improve the sixth form and know what further action is needed to secure improvements.

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

Views of parents and carers

A small proportion of parents responded to the questionnaire. A very large majority agree with the statements. There were some areas where one or two parents indicated a difference from the majority, particularly around communication. Some parents also wrote positive comments about this aspect, referring, for example to the coffee

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mornings and the provision of family learning activities. Inspectors consider that the academy works hard to communicate with all parents and carers and has very positive relationships with the majority. At the same time, inspectors agree with the academy that, particularly during this time of considerable change, it needs to continually review the effectiveness of communication channels with all parents.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Swindon Academy 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 93 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1431 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	43	46	42	45	5	5	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	39	42	51	55	1	1	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	41	44	44	47	3	3	1	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	34	37	48	52	9	10	1	1
The teaching is good at this school	33	35	54	58	3	3	2	2
The school helps me to support my child's learning	32	34	51	55	6	6	1	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	27	29	56	60	5	5	3	3
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)	27	29	56	60	5	5	3	4
The school meets my child's particular needs	30	32	52	56	9	10	1	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	27	29	50	54	9	10	2	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	25	27	53	57	6	6	2	2
The school is led and managed effectively	30	32	52	56	6	6	1	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	40	43	38	41	10	11	3	3

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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	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.



29 January 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Swindon Academy, Swindon SN2 7HS

Thank you for the welcome you gave us when we inspected your academy. We really enjoyed our visit and we learnt a lot from listening to you and seeing you at work in your lessons and other activities. You are right to be proud of the academy. Very few schools have a nursery, primary, secondary and sixth form all together and it is real challenge to make it work. There have been huge improvements since it opened in 2007 and since our first visit last March. The academy is quickly heading in the right direction and while the Principal and her staff should take a lot of the credit, so should you. We saw a lot of good teaching and in these lessons we could see you working hard. Some lessons were not as good as that and we have asked teachers to improve these, for example by making sure that they give you better guidance about how to improve. In the sixth form, we have asked teachers to make sure you have more chances to develop skills in working on your own.

You told us that you have noticed that teachers are placing more emphasis on making sure you do as well as you can in your exams. Some of you are doing better than others. Those of you who are the youngest in the academy are doing well and so are those in the extension phase. We can see that those of you who are in Years 3 to 6 are now working much harder and this is good because in the past results have been a concern. We can also see that some of you are doing better in English and science than in mathematics. We have asked the academy to make sure that progress is more even across subjects, between year groups and in the sixth form. We have also asked the academy to improve careers guidance in the sixth form and ensure that the courses you can take are the best ones for you.

It is good to see you enjoying your brand new building at Beech Avenue and we can see that work is also underway to improve accommodation at Alton Close. We hope that these improvements will be matched by your own continued success and that the academy, with your help, will get better and better.

Yours sincerely

John Kennedy

Her Majesty's Inspector

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