

Swanwick Hall School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	112930
Local Authority	DERBYSHIRE LA
Inspection number	311059
Inspection dates	11–12 February 2008
Reporting inspector	Tony Beaver

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1330
6th form	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Marina Fournier-Farmer
Headteacher	Mr Jonathan Fawcett
Date of previous school inspection	12 January 2004
School address	Derby Road Swanwick Alfreton Derbyshire DE55 1AE
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Age group	11–18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by five Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is much larger than most secondary schools. Joint provision is made with other local education partners for some sixth form courses. Average numbers of students claim free school meals. The vast majority of students are from White British backgrounds. Very few students are at an early stage in learning English as an additional language. Fewer students are identified with learning difficulties and/or disabilities than in most schools, but average numbers have statements of special need. The school has higher-performing specialist status. It has three specialisms: technology, vocational and training school. It holds several awards: the Careers Mark, Healthy Schools, Eco School (Bronze and Silver Awards), European award for languages, and it is a hub school in the sports coordinator programme.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school, accurately recognising its strengths and correctly identifying key areas for improvement. Senior leaders, staff and governors are strongly resolved to raise standards further. Improvement in the last two years confirms that the school has good capacity to continue to advance. The school works outstandingly well in partnership with others, including a wide range of agencies to enhance educational provision. It gives good value for money.

The headteacher took up his post in April 2006. Since that time, the school's improvement has accelerated. The restructured senior leadership team support the headteacher well. They share with governors the determination to make the school outstanding by 2010. Their effective teamwork and keen sense of purpose is leading to improved achievement across the main school. Since 2006, students' rate of progress has increased in Years 10 and 11. Leaders and managers are using the school's three specialist statuses well to improve the quality of education and students' achievement. For example, teachers' skills are enhanced through training-school activities, and the vocational specialism is exceptionally successful in extending curricular opportunities and raising standards. Senior leaders' effective monitoring and evaluation practice impacts well on teaching, learning and achievement. Practice and impact are less consistent among middle leaders and managers in ensuring students achieve equally well across all subjects. For example, exceptional achievement in information and communication technology is not matched in many other GCSE subjects.

Students achieve well. When they enter Year 7, attainment is slightly below the national average but by Year 11, standards are average. Standards are generally below average in Key Stage 3, and this is a high priority for improvement. Students' rate of progress is sound in Key Stage 3 and becomes rapid in Key Stage 4. Almost all Year 11 students gain five or more GCSE grades – an above-average percentage – and increasing numbers are choosing to continue their education in the successful sixth form. Students achieve particularly well on vocational courses. Students with special educational learning, behavioural and physical needs achieve well. Academic targets are very challenging, but staff believe they can be achieved, and helpful initiatives are in place to ensure they are reached in 2008. The school's accurate assessment of current performance in Year 11 indicates that standards are much better than in previous years. For example, modular science results for 2008, already received, show good achievement.

The large majority of students have positive attitudes to work and enjoy school. They concentrate in lessons and respond well to teachers. Very occasionally, less effective teaching leads to deteriorating behaviour, as a small minority of parents point out. Students behave responsibly around the extensive site. They show clear understanding of how to keep safe and adopt a healthy life-style; many are involved in extra-curricular sport. They act responsibly, and show good moral and social responsibility to the school community, for example through school and year councils.

The quality of education has considerable strengths. The curriculum gives a good range of opportunities for students of wide-ranging abilities. The range of vocational provision for Years 10 and 11 is impressive and enables all students to gain a good range of qualifications at age 16. Students are cared for well. They receive increasingly helpful guidance and direction in academic work in Key Stage 4, but similar provision is less well developed in Key Stage 3. The quality of teaching and learning is good and well supported by training activities, although teachers' skills vary in how well work is adapted for more-able students.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Students' personal development is good. Many take responsibility for younger students and contribute well to the lower school. Achievement is good, given students' starting points on entry to advanced courses. Almost all gain at least pass grades on AS- and A-level courses, well in line with the national average. The vast majority of students complete the courses they begin. Students following intermediate-level courses also achieve well. Effective leadership and management ensure that teaching and learning is successful, enabling students to make good progress. The outstanding curriculum gives an extensive choice of advanced courses, and the opportunity to study a wide range of vocational courses at different levels, through highly effective liaison with educational partners. Students receive well-directed support in their work, and helpful guidance in choosing careers and in seeking opportunities in higher education.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards by the end of Year 9.
- Build on the existing good practice in academic guidance to help all students, but especially those in Key Stage 3, to understand how to make better progress and attain higher standards.
- Improve the leadership skills of middle managers so that they use their expertise more effectively in raising standards in their subjects.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students enter Year 7 attaining standards a little below the national average. They achieve well across the main school, after a slow start in Key Stage 3, where progress is satisfactory. Progress becomes rapid in Years 10 and 11, and is especially good in English.

Challenging targets have been set for 2008, and a range of appropriate initiatives is being implemented to raise standards across Years 7 to 9, where they are currently below average. In Key Stage 4, standards were average overall in 2007. Almost every student gained five GCSE graded results. Those identified with special educational learning and behavioural needs and those with physical disabilities achieve well due to the effective teaching and support they receive. As in Key Stage 3, students and staff are responding positively to challenging targets to raise achievement and standards further. The school's assessment data show that GCSE results are likely to be considerably higher in 2008, with less inconsistency between subjects. Most specialist-school targets are reached. In the sixth form, students achieve well on AS- and A-level courses. Almost all gain pass standards in the subjects they take. Results of advanced courses are in line with the national average. Students following intermediate-level courses also achieve well.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students have a strong sense of community and a thorough understanding of what is morally and socially acceptable. They are supportive of one another, and are active members of the year and school councils. Students develop a good sense of responsibility through their

involvement in decision-making processes. They make very good contributions to the wider community, particularly through charity work, which extends to national and international communities and helps students develop cultural awareness. Their response to spiritual reflection is less well developed. Students feel safe in school and say that there is little bullying and that if it occurs, it is dealt with effectively. Behaviour is generally good and the school has worked hard to improve it. A small minority of parents express concern that a few students misbehave in lessons where classroom management is less secure. Inspectors found this to be rare. Students understand what makes a healthy lifestyle. They participate well in sport and appreciate the healthy food choices on offer. Students, particularly in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form, successfully develop the skills useful to their future economic well-being through the vocational courses they study. Older students know their academic targets and how well they are doing. Younger students do not always have a clear idea of their targets or what they need to do to improve. Attendance is satisfactory, and the school continues to strive to improve it.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teaching and learning are improving, and are consistently good in the sixth form. Senior leaders are using training-school expertise effectively to monitor, evaluate and improve the quality of teaching. For example, advanced skills teachers give guidance and support to reduce inconsistencies in the quality of teaching. Most lessons are stimulating and well planned to engage students, who learn with enthusiasm and work well both independently and with others. A recent focus of training is to improve the use of assessment to guide students' learning. The impact is evident in the consistent way that teachers use clear objectives to guide lessons and share expectations for what is to be learned with students. Progress is best in Years 10 and 11, where teachers give students good guidance, in lessons and in marking, on how to achieve target grades. This practice is less consistent in Key Stage 3. The best teaching makes good use of assessment to ensure that all students are appropriately challenged. Teachers' good subject knowledge underpins probing questions that encourage students to think and explain. Teaching assistants promote the good progress of those who find learning difficult. Where teaching is weaker, activities are not matched well enough to some students' needs, particularly to those of the more able, and teachers talk for too long. In a few lessons, this leads to restless and deteriorating behaviour.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

The curriculum meets the needs and aspirations of students well. It has a positive impact on achievement, although this is more evident in Key Stage 4 than in Key Stage 3. The school's innovative approach to the curriculum in Year 7 is underpinned by effective collaborative planning with primary schools. This cross-phase partnership involves most subjects and is strengthened by the school's specialist activities. The impact of the school's specialist status is also seen in the effective use of technological resources to support teaching and learning, and in the comprehensive mix of academic and vocational courses offered in Key Stage 4. Careful planning ensures that students are able to select courses that are closely matched to

their needs and interests. This contributes well to the good progress students make in Years 10 and 11, and to their future economic well-being. The curriculum is complemented by an extensive range of enrichment activities. Students of all abilities enjoy and take advantage of the many sporting and other clubs and activities, educational visits and residential opportunities the school offers. The sixth form provides an outstanding range of academic and vocational courses which are particularly well matched to students' needs and aspirations. Consequently, they enjoy and appreciate their education and very few fail to complete their courses.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school's multi-layered approach to reward, support and sanction ensures that students receive very good care, especially those who are vulnerable, challenging, or who have particular learning or behavioural difficulties. These students thrive as a result. Staff know students and their families well and provide effective support. They are also able to guide students to make successful options and career choices that meet their needs and aspirations effectively. Staff work hard to support students in achieving increasingly challenging targets and older students have a good understanding of their own progress. Academic guidance for younger students is less secure. In the sixth form, monitoring of progress is particularly good. The best marking gives clear advice for improvement, but the quality overall is inconsistent. Impressive links are made with external agencies, which, coupled with high quality professional development, ensure that staff increasingly understand the best methods for supporting vulnerable students in their care. Teaching assistants are very supportive and effective. Robust child-protection and safeguarding procedures are in place.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Leadership and management are sharply focused on improvement. The vision for the school's future is realised with energy and skill by the headteacher and a recently re-structured senior leadership team. Teaching and support staff share the common purpose of improving standards and meeting the needs of all students. Leaders ensure the school has a highly inclusive ethos. For example, students with a wide range of special needs achieve well. Senior leaders monitor and evaluate the school's performance rigorously. Monitoring and quality assurance by subject leaders is of less consistent quality and variable in impact. Academic targets are based on increasingly accurate and valuable assessment information. The targets are challenging for staff and students but usually they are achieved. Targets for the improvement of attendance have been met. Specialist status has a positive impact on provision and standards. Vocational provision and training links with local schools and the community are strong features of the school's work. Furthermore, opportunities presented through the school's training-school status aid staff recruitment. The complex school site is well managed. A recent building and refurbishment programme has improved the quality of accommodation. Governors are led well. Their committees gather detailed and accurate information about the school's strengths and areas for development. The governing body is closely involved in strategic planning to meet

the school's aims. The sixth form is well led and managed. It provides effectively for the wide-ranging needs of students.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	3	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

¹ Grade 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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

13 February 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Swanwick Hall School, Swanwick, Derbyshire DE55 1AE

Thank you for your courtesy and help during the recent inspection. Students who had the opportunity to speak to inspectors told us they enjoyed going to Swanwick Hall and that the school is helping them to do well. Your views were very helpful to the inspection team. This letter tells you what we thought about your school.

Your school gives you a good education, including in the sixth form. Here are some of the key strengths.

- Your good progress and achievement which enable everyone to get a good number of exam qualifications.
- Your positive attitudes to learning, and generally good behaviour.
- Good teaching that gives all students the opportunity to do their best.
- The extensive range of courses available to you, and the good care you receive to help you to be successful.
- The benefits the school's three specialisms give you, especially the impressive range of vocational opportunities.
- The good leadership of your headteacher and staff who are working hard to make the school even better.

There is almost always something that could be improved.

- The standards you reach in Years 7 to 9 should be higher.
- The guidance you receive to improve your work could be as good for younger students as it is for older ones.
- Subject leaders should check that you reach your best standard so that you do equally well in all subjects.

Yours sincerely

Dr Tony Beaver Lead inspector