

Swanshurst School

Brook Lane, Billesley, Birmingham, B13 0TW

Inspection dates 20–21 November 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The proportion of students who achieve five good GCSE grades at A* to C, including English and mathematics is above average.
- Students make good progress overall in English and mathematics, and some make exceptional progress.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge, which helps them to set appropriately challenging and interesting work for students.
- Most lessons proceed at a fast pace and this ensures that students learn quickly and make good, and sometimes outstanding, progress.
- The sixth form is good. Most students make good progress in a wide range of subjects.
- The overwhelming majority of students have good attitudes to learning. They are well behaved, polite and courteous, feel safe at school and attend regularly.
- Leaders and managers, including subject leaders, have improved teaching and maintained good levels of achievement for almost all students. They have an accurate understanding of the school's performance.
- Governors know the school's strengths and areas for improvement. Consequently, they provide an effective level of challenge and support.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- A minority of lower ability students, some of whom are supported by the pupil premium, do not achieve as well in English as they do in other subjects.
- A small minority of students do not always show the good attitudes to learning that are shown by the very large majority of students.
- Not all teachers check the progress of students in their lessons and modify activities to match their understanding and needs.
- Marking is not always clear enough to help students improve their work.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 52 lessons, seven of which were jointly observed with senior leaders. The inspection team also made several short visits to other lessons to check on the progress and behaviour of different groups of students.
- Meetings were held with four groups of students from all year groups. Other meetings were held with governors, senior leaders and staff, including those responsible for leading subjects.
- Inspectors analysed the 70 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, and the 70 responses to a staff questionnaire.
- Inspectors observed the work of the school and looked at a number of documents, including those relating to the monitoring of teaching and the targets set for teachers to improve their work. They also looked at records relating to attendance, behaviour, bullying and safeguarding, the school's improvement plan and data on students' progress.
- The lead inspector held two separate discussions with a representative from the local authority and a consultant who works with the school.

Inspection team

Richard Sutton, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Justine McNeillie	Additional Inspector
Kerin Jones	Additional Inspector
Neil Morris	Additional Inspector
Elizabeth Needham	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is much larger than the average-sized secondary school with a sixth form.
- The large majority of students are from minority ethnic heritages. The proportion of such students in the school is almost four times higher than average, as is the proportion who speak English as an additional language. At around half the students, the largest group is of Pakistani origin.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is slightly higher than average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is below average.
- The proportion of students supported through the pupil premium, which is additional funding given to schools for certain groups such as students in local authority care and those known to be eligible for free school meals, is much higher than average.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching so that it is consistently good and more is outstanding by ensuring that:
 - marking and feedback are always precise enough to help students to improve their work
 - all teachers check the progress that students are making during lessons and modify the work if it is too easy or too hard
 - teachers encourage all students to develop the same good attitudes to learning in their lessons that are consistently shown by the great majority.
- Raise achievement in English by checking on students' progress regularly to make sure that:
 - lower-ability students consistently make the progress that is expected of them
 - the achievement of students supported by the pupil premium in this subject is always consistently good.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students join Swanshurst School with average levels of attainment. By the time they leave Year 11, most students have made good progress in a range of subjects and some have made excellent progress. As a result, the proportion of students who achieve five good GCSE grades at A* to C, including English and mathematics, is above average.
- More-able students achieve well; the proportion gaining the highest grades is high at GCSE and it has improved considerably at A level.
- The progress made by the vast majority of students accelerates as they move up the school. In Key Stage 4, most students make rapid progress and this ensures that they are very well prepared for further study, employment or training.
- In the recent past, the school has entered some students early for parts of their GCSE mathematics and English examinations. This has been an effective strategy as it has ensured that students achieve their potential.
- The school spends the pupil premium in a variety of ways; for example, on additional staff so that students benefit from working in smaller classes. Students of all abilities who are supported through the pupil premium achieve significantly better than similar students nationally and many do as well as other students in the school. For a minority, however, gaps remain between their attainment and their classmates. These are closing rapidly in most subjects but the gap in English for this minority has not closed in the past two years. This year, eligible students in Year 11 achieved, on average, two-thirds of a grade below other students in English, as they did in mathematics, although in this subject, the rate of improvement was greater.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs, students from minority ethnic heritages and those who speak English as an additional language make good progress overall. This is because teachers have an accurate understanding of these students' needs and plan lessons carefully to ensure these groups of students can access learning as easily as the others.
- Achievement in the sixth form has improved steadily in recent years and is now good. This is because teaching has improved and leaders have put in place good systems for checking students' progress so that they can quickly identify any student who falls behind. Consequently, a much higher proportion of students than previously are passing their examinations, particularly in Year 12, many of who achieve the highest grades.
- The school uses the Year 7 catch-up funding to provide smaller classes for students who joined the school with below average attainment in English and mathematics. This is proving to be an effective strategy in mathematics because students are making good progress but, in English, it is sometimes less effective because individual less-able students do not always make as much progress as their performance elsewhere suggests they should.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is good overall and is sometimes outstanding. Most lessons proceed at a brisk pace and ensure that the large majority of students make rapid gains in their knowledge, skills and understanding. This is the main reason why students make good progress.

- Good teaching in the school is typically characterised by teachers who have very good subject knowledge which helps them to plan interesting, creative and appropriately challenging tasks for the vast majority of their students. In the very best lessons, teachers help students to take responsibility for their learning while, at the same time, making sure that activities are pitched at the right level for each student. For example, in a Year 11 drama lesson, the teacher skilfully used different types of questions to help the students develop an in-depth understanding of their work at a high level.
- A particular strength of Key Stage 4 and sixth form teaching is the very good knowledge that teachers have of examination requirements. Consequently, most teachers are able to help students to improve their work so that they gain good grades.
- The teaching of disabled students, those who have special educational needs and those from minority ethnic groups or who are learning English as a second language, is good. This is because teachers have a detailed understanding of the specific needs of these students and they are skilful in planning work which helps them to learn effectively.
- In general, the quality of marking and feedback is good because it helps students to improve their work. At times, however, it is not as helpful as it should be. This is the case when teachers' comments give students insufficiently precise guidance on what they need to do to improve their work.
- Occasionally, individual teachers do not check sufficiently on the progress that each student is making during lessons. This means that work is not changed when students are finding it too hard or too easy and, on occasion, this leads to individual students losing concentration and going off task.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Students behave well, both in lessons and at break times, and they appreciate how much behaviour has improved in recent years. The vast majority are consistently polite, courteous and well mannered in lessons and around the school.
- Relationships in the school are extremely positive because teachers promote these effectively with students. Consequently, students show a good level of mutual respect for each other and their teachers.
- Older students value the opportunities they are given to take positions of responsibility. For example, some Year 11 students are prefects. The level of respect shown by younger students for the authority that these prefects have is impressive.
- Bullying is rare at the school. Students are confident that, on the occasions when bullying does occur, staff will deal with matters quickly and effectively. Students have a good understanding of the various forms in which bullying can occur, including cyber-bullying.
- Students feel safe at school and they have a good understanding of safety matters, including e-safety. They are fully equipped with the skills needed to manage risk in various situations, should this be necessary.
- Students attend school regularly and arrive on time.
- Most students have good attitudes to learning, try their best and show a determination to

succeed and achieve their personal best. The overwhelming majority willingly work together in lessons and support each other well. Just occasionally, individuals fail to match the high standards set by the rest, and this is why behaviour and safety are not outstanding.

The leadership and management are good

- All leaders and managers, including subject leaders, communicate high expectations of what all students and staff are capable of achieving. Consequently, the achievement of students is good.
- Leaders provide teachers and managers with good-quality training and development so that teaching continues to improve. For example, staff from different departments regularly work with each other so that they can improve their teaching.
- All teachers are set targets to improve their teaching and guide decisions about pay increases. Good-quality training enables them to work towards achieving their targets, and so further improve their teaching skills and the achievement of students.
- As a result of leaders' thorough systems for checking and monitoring its performance, the school has an accurate awareness of its own strengths and weaknesses. This informs the improvement plan, which is suitably focused on the most important areas for improvement. However, the school has not resolved the issue of some students' comparatively weaker achievement in English as successfully as it has in other subjects.
- The good leadership of the sixth form has resulted in improved examination results. Sixth form leaders have a strong ability to maintain these improvements as they have ensured that the systems for checking students' achievement are consistently and systematically applied in all departments.
- The school has reviewed its sixth form provision to ensure it will be able to meet the expectations of the new 16 to 19 Study Programme and provide appropriate courses for students who are now required to stay in school until the age of 18. Currently, this applies to very few students in the school: the attainment profile of this year's entry group into the sixth form is not markedly different to that of previous year groups.
- The curriculum gives students exciting opportunities to develop their skills and understanding. Numerous extra-curricular activities also help students to develop wider interests beyond the usual lessons, and attendance at these is good. Particular strengths of the curriculum are the wide and diverse opportunities which students have to develop their spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness and understanding. For example, each year the school holds its 'Veterans Day' which involves both the school and wider community. Students value this as it helps them to explore and learn about a wide range of issues. Consequently, they are engaged in their studies and are keen to succeed.
- Students receive good, independent advice on their career and employment options, both in the main school and in the sixth form, and are well prepared for life after school.
- The school has been largely successful in improving the opportunities available to different groups of students so that all have the chance to achieve well by the time they leave.
- The local authority has provided an appropriate level of support and challenge to the school. Most recently, the local authority supported the school in working with other schools and also supported improvements in the sixth form. This support has been appropriate.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- The governing body has a good and appropriately detailed understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Governors understand students' achievement data well and this enables them to provide a good level of challenge and support to the school.
- Governors monitor the use and impact of the additional pupil premium and Year 7 catch-up funding. They are aware that this is helping to improve the achievement of most eligible students and they are also aware of the continuing need to prioritise improvements in English.
- Governors are aware of the methods used to set targets for teachers and how these are monitored and linked to pay increases. They make sure that the school fulfils its responsibilities regarding safeguarding; all staff have been checked as required and are trained appropriately to keep students safe and free from harm.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	103514
Local authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	427108

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	11–19
Gender of pupils	Girls
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1789
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	298
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Philip Thickett
Headteacher	Elaine Kenney
Date of previous school inspection	24 September 2008
Telephone number	0121 4642400
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