

Swanlea School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	100973
Local Authority	Tower Hamlets
Inspection number	307547
Inspection dates	18-19 November 2008
Reporting inspector	Lynn Bappa

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	11-16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1006
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Habib Rahman FCA
Headteacher	Ms Linda Austin
Date of previous school inspection	18 April 2005
School address	31 Brady Street Bethnal Green London E1 5DJ
Telephone number	020 7375 3267
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Age group	11-16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is a larger than average school which has specialist status in business and enterprise. There are significantly more boys than girls, primarily because there are several girls' schools in the locality. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is much higher than average. Almost all the students come from minority ethnic backgrounds, mostly Bangladeshi, and speak English as an additional language. The percentage of students arriving at or leaving the school part way through the year is much higher than usual. The percentage of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average. These mostly relate to moderate or specific learning difficulties, speech problems and behavioural and emotional difficulties. The school has the Healthy Schools award, Investors in People, Artsmark silver, the International award and Advanced Status for Out of Hours Learning Provision.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Swanlea is an outstanding school where students of all abilities and backgrounds thrive, both academically and personally. Many of the students have experienced challenging circumstances in their lives and have only praise and admiration for their school. As one student commented, 'It feels like a real family here.' A key strength of the school is its belief that all can succeed, evidenced in the excellent progress made by vulnerable and disadvantaged students.

The vast majority of students make excellent progress overall during their time in the school, reaching above average standards by the end of Year 11. Attainment on entry is low. The school achieved its best-ever Year 9 test results in 2007, although these were well below average. Although standards dipped in 2008, students currently in Key Stage 3 are making good progress and the school is on track to significantly increase the percentage of students achieving expected and higher levels in English, mathematics and science. Secure foundations for learning are laid in Key Stage 3, when students' basic skills, particularly in literacy, are still being consolidated. These foundations stand students in very good stead for the next stage in their education, resulting in exceptionally rapid progress being made in Years 10 and 11. Senior leaders are rightly aware, however, that they need to do more to drive up standards in Key Stage 3.

Very positive relationships between teachers and students ensure an excellent climate for learning. High-quality teaching enables students of all abilities to achieve extremely well during their time in the school. Students thoroughly enjoy lessons because tasks spark their interest and lessons contain a very good variety of activities. Although teaching is outstanding overall, there is more variability in Key Stage 3, where it is consistently good rather than outstanding, because there are occasions when there is insufficient focus on enabling students to develop independent learning skills.

The outstanding personal development and well-being of students are testimony to the school's very strong systems for academic support and its exceptionally caring atmosphere. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Students have an impressive understanding of cultural diversity issues and show high levels of tolerance towards those from different backgrounds or beliefs. Students enjoy their education and behave well in lessons and around the school. They respond very well to excellent teaching and an outstanding curriculum that is innovative and flexible in meeting their needs.

Swanlea School is exceptionally well led by the dedicated headteacher and senior leadership team. All staff have a shared commitment to good academic standards and the promotion of students' personal development. The governing body knows the school extremely well and provides the headteacher with excellent support while offering very good challenge.

The school's specialist status has been instrumental in raising standards throughout the school, improving teaching and learning and developing excellent links with local partners and the community. Enrichment for the community provides very good access to a range of learning resources and activities for those in often overcrowded home circumstances.

What the school should do to improve further

■ Raise standards in English, mathematics and science in Key Stage 3, with a particular focus on increasing students' opportunities to improve their independent learning skills.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Students make outstanding progress overall during their time in the school. They enter the school with standards that are low, with particularly significant weaknesses in literacy. Students arriving mid-phase often have exceptionally low attainment on entry and often join the school with little or no English and extremely difficult home circumstances. Despite this, the school has been extremely successful in enabling an above average proportion of students to gain five or more GCSE A* to C passes by the end of Year 11. The proportion of students gaining at least five A* to G passes is comfortably above the national average and almost everyone leaves the school with at least one qualification. Results in the specialist subjects of business studies and information and communication technology (ICT) are well above average. The picture is more variable in Key Stage 3, where standards by the end of Year 9 have often been exceptionally low. A more focused approach on teaching the basic skills, particularly in literacy, resulted in the school achieving its best-ever Year 9 test results in 2007, although standards remained well below average. Standards dipped slightly in 2008 and the school took immediate and well-timed action to tackle this decline. This action is bearing fruit. The school's tracking shows that students currently in Key Stage 3 are making good progress and are well on track to meet the school's challenging targets in 2009. The evidence indicates that the percentage of students predicted to gain at least the expected levels in English, mathematics and science is likely to rise significantly in both 2009 and 2010. Students who find learning difficult achieve extremely well in relation to their starting points, owing to the exemplary pastoral and academic support they receive. Higher-attaining students make similar rates of progress as their classmates. This is shown in the percentage achieving three or more A* or A grades, which has increased significantly in the last three years and is now over 20%. Vulnerable students, including those who arrive mid-phase, are fully included in every aspect of school life and make excellent progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Students are very proud of their school and thoroughly enjoy all the activities it offers. This is reflected in their above average attendance rates and good behaviour. Students are friendly, courteous and energetic. They value education and want to succeed. They are reflective and thoughtful and are excellent ambassadors for multicultural Britain. They know how to live healthy lives and feel extremely safe in school. Increasing numbers of students eat the healthy school meals at lunchtime and many of them walk at least part of the way to school every day. Students are given a wide range of responsibilities, such as the opportunity to become a 'SPARC', and these enable them to develop into self-confident and motivated young people. They say that the school values and acts upon their opinions and this view is echoed by their teachers, one of whom said enthusiastically, 'One comment from a child can spark a new initiative.' The school council, which has its own budget, has an active voice on school matters and has succeeded in changing aspects of school life. Students have a strong sense of responsibility towards their local communities through activities such as planting a garden in the local Somali Centre and providing a venue for elderly local Muslims to pray when they found it difficult to travel to a mosque. They are extremely well prepared for the next stage of their education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Positive attitudes, strong relationships and a thirst for learning create the right climate to succeed and make a significant contribution to the outstanding teaching. Students are not afraid to make mistakes because they know their teachers will help them to develop and correct their ideas. As one student commented, 'They go out of their way to help.' Teachers plan lessons very carefully to meet the range of abilities within groups and provide an interesting range

of activities to motivate and engage their students. Work is well marked and written comments enable students to understand what they have done well and what they need to do to improve. Although teaching is outstanding overall, senior leaders have rightly identified that teaching is more consistently of a high quality in Key Stage 4 than in Key Stage 3. Occasionally, and more in Key Stage 3 than Key Stage 4, lessons are too directed by teachers with insufficient opportunities for students to develop independent learning skills.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is very well tailored to the aspirations of the students and provides them with excellent opportunities to succeed. Provision for basic literacy skills, including growing links with primary school partners, is strong and improving and this is beginning to have a positive impact on standards in Key Stage 3. In Years 10 and 11 excellent pathways for students have been developed, including vocational courses and very good opportunities for work experience and enterprise activities that enhance their understanding of the world of work. Students are given excellent guidance about their choice of courses and future decisions. The curriculum is enhanced through a very good range of clubs and out-of-school learning and enrichment activities. These include, for example, some single-sex provision to allow girls to express themselves in activities such as the hip-hop club. Parents agree about extra-curricular provision. As one parent commented, 'I think my son has been given fantastic opportunities to improve his skills. Each year he has done something valuable and fun at/outside school - the teachers work very hard to make all these wonderful activities happen and I am very grateful to Swanlea and its staff. They have been fantastic!'

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school provides an outstanding caring environment in which students can flourish as individuals and as members of the community. This is a school where every child really does matter. Child protection procedures are robust and meet government requirements. Students value highly the advice and support given to them in developing their careers and guiding them to appropriate choices at post-16. The school offers a wide range of extended services, including learning mentors, a social worker and a community police officer. This provision enables them to address personal and emotional difficulties well. Staff manage behaviour well and, as a result, the levels of fixed-term exclusions are falling. Attendance management systems are very good. The school works extremely hard to raise students' levels of self-esteem and confidence and, as a result, their aspirations are high.

The academic guidance given to students is a major strength of the school. Systems for monitoring and tracking students' progress are robust, embedded across the school and used very effectively to support improved achievement. Those identified as underachieving are challenged and targeted to good effect, and given additional help where necessary.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The headteacher sets very high expectations, and is an exemplary leader who is very well supported by a dedicated and talented leadership team. She is passionate and proud of the school's successes, yet constantly wants to find ways of doing even better. Teamwork is a strong feature of the school and everyone plays a part in moving it forward. The excellent personal development of the students is a result of strong pastoral leadership at all levels. The school has an inclusive and harmonious atmosphere because staff are deeply committed to serving the school's diverse population. Staff, parents and students are rightly proud of this aspect of school life.

The school understands itself very well and this ensures continuing improvement based on an excellent knowledge of what works well and why. Swift and decisive action is taken when evaluation suggests that things need to change. The school has an excellent capacity to improve on its already high standards.

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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
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Overall effectiveness

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

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

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

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.

All white boxes must be completed. The grey boxes are used wherever the inspection team has sufficient evidence to come to a secure judgement.

² IE - denotes that insufficient evidence was available to inspectors for a judgement to be made.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Annex B

Letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection.

02 December 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Swanlea School, London, E1 5DJ

Thank you for the warm welcome that you extended to us during the recent inspection of your school. We very much enjoyed discussing with you the work that you were doing and hearing your opinions of the school. We thought you would like a summary of the inspection findings, but also hope that you will take the opportunity to read the whole report.

We think your school is outstanding and you have helped to make it such a brilliant place to be. The thing that impressed us most is that, no matter whether you find learning easy or difficult, or whatever your background, the school values you and helps you to achieve the best you can. As a result, you work very hard and enjoy learning. You do very well in your tests and examinations and make excellent progress during your time in the school. We were also impressed by the excellent contribution that the business college makes to your education. Your school is extremely well led by the headteacher and her senior team. The teachers and other adults who work at the school care about you, support you extremely well and work hard to make sure that you are safe. You all get on together extremely well and your attendance is good. You believe that bullying and racism are dealt with well and we agree with you. We were impressed by your level of involvement in a wide range of activities outside the normal day.

Outstanding schools are not necessarily perfect. The senior leaders and all staff will be working hard to improve the quality of teaching so that even more of it is excellent. They will focus on developing your independent learning skills more consistently across Key Stage 3. You can help them in this by continuing to work hard and by asking teachers when you do not understand, so that they can help you to become more independent.

Yours sincerely

Dr Lynn Bappa
Lead Inspector

