

# Swindon Academy

Beech Avenue, Swindon, Wiltshire SN2 1JR

## Inspection dates

24–25 May 2017

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Good</b>
Effectiveness of leadership and management	<b>Good</b>
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	<b>Good</b>
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	<b>Good</b>
Outcomes for pupils	<b>Good</b>
Early years provision	<b>Good</b>
16 to 19 study programmes	<b>Good</b>
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school

- Trustees, governors and leaders have worked tirelessly to ensure that pupils succeed within the all-through school and are providing them with enriched experiences.
- Teachers research and evaluate the best way to teach the diverse age range of pupils. Consequently, teaching, learning and assessment are good.
- Leaders in the secondary phase have maintained the high standards achieved in the end-of-year key stage tests in 2016.
- Current pupils are working with outcomes closer to national averages following the disappointing outcomes in key stage 2 in 2016. Pupils are making rapid progress in English and mathematics. However, more could be done to challenge the most able and the most able disadvantaged pupils.
- Pupils are well behaved and ready to learn. Leaders have very clear expectations of appropriate behaviour, which teachers manage effectively and consistently.
- Children in the newly-opened Nursery provision are learning well. They are well prepared to move on to the Reception class. However, teachers in the early years do not teach children to develop their writing skills well enough in preparation for key stage 1 in writing.
- There have been improvements for students studying academic subjects in the sixth form because of good teaching.
- Most disadvantaged pupils throughout the school are achieving as well as other pupils nationally because of the good quality of teaching.
- Pupils are provided with a vast range of extra-curricular opportunities that enhance their understanding of the arts, provide cultural stimuli and build on pupils' sporting prowess. However, more could be done to help pupils understand British values.
- Improved provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities has been planned recently but the impact is not yet discernible.

## Full report

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:
  - pupils are challenged more, in particular the most able and most able disadvantaged, to make sure they reach their potential
  - early years staff provide sufficient opportunities to fully develop children’s writing skills
  - the new provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is monitored carefully to make sure that it is improving outcomes for these pupils
  - there are sufficient opportunities in place to fully support pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

**Good**

- The trustees have secured their ambition for the all-through school through relentless rigour and robust accountability. As a result, the majority of pupils are making good progress, regardless of age, from their different starting points.
- Leaders' and governors' determination to aim high has allowed more pupils to continue to higher education, training or employment.
- The principal has steered the school steadfastly through difficult staffing situations that had temporarily halted progress for pupils in the primary phase in 2016. Now, these pupils are making rapid progress, particularly in English and mathematics.
- The innovative recruitment processes implemented by the school mean that teaching assistants, known as teaching fellows, are able to proceed to the Schools Direct programme run by the trust and thereby gain teaching qualifications while working at the school. Most of these trainees stay on at the school once qualified. This means that staffing is stable for the first time in several years. Consequently, pupils experience consistency in teaching, behaviour management and other aspects of school life, which helps them to succeed more quickly.
- Leaders have cultivated systems for developing the performance of teachers based on coaching and support. This has led to a culture of openness, respect and trust between staff that pervades the school. Staff are aware of their accountability and manage their own professional development through research and reflection, with clear analysis as to what will work best for the pupils in the school.
- Leaders and governors manage teachers' performance well, setting appropriate targets dependent on their pay awards. Subject leaders are held rigorously to account now for the standards achieved in their curriculum areas. There is an expectation that they will challenge staff, as well as pupils, when expectations of pupils' progress are not high enough.
- Disadvantaged pupils make up over two thirds of the school population. The pupil premium funding is spent wisely and these pupils are doing as well as other pupils nationally and often better than their peers.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced and evaluated constantly. Sixth-form provision is changing from its historical focus on sport and physical education qualifications to a more rounded curriculum offering academic and vocational courses that will benefit students in their 21st-century lives. The secondary curriculum is adapting to provide more efficient continuation from the challenging primary curriculum. This develops into more effective subject choices for pupils when taking GCSEs and greater academic success.

- There has been a lack of challenge for the most able pupils. However, changes have recently been made to improve this. One of these is a further development of the long-standing link with a local independent school by introducing new subjects and enrichment opportunities. High-ability pupils are stretched academically by the curriculum and teachers are supported by colleagues from the independent school. As yet, this opportunity is available to current Year 7 pupils only. Parents are enthusiastic about its advantages and future year groups will be offered a similar choice. There is more to be done to ensure that pupils are stretched in other year groups.
- Leaders are determined to enrich the lives of pupils and offer a host of extra-curricular clubs and visits that develop and enhance pupils' creativity, cultural understanding and healthy lifestyles. These engage the interest of pupils and the great majority participate. Pupils enjoy these activities, are successful in them and gain confidence accordingly. School leaders keep a close eye on the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and ensure that any barriers to their participation are removed. This inclusive practice is typical of the leaders and staff at the school and contributes to the positive attitudes of the pupils.
- The physical education and sport premium is used well in the primary phase. A specialist in physical education has worked with pupils and trained staff so that new skills learned can be maintained.
- Pupils eligible for Year 7 literacy and numeracy catch-up funding are making good progress. The use of reading programmes has had a significant impact on the progress of pupils' accuracy and comprehension when reading. Changes are being made to the mathematics curriculum because this has not been as successful.
- The spiritual, moral, social and cultural curriculum is not secure throughout the school. There are pockets of great success, such as the developments in securing the emotional health and well-being of pupils. However, the understanding of British values is patchy and some of the older pupils do not understand the fundamental principles of democracy and the rule of law effectively enough.

## **Governance of the school**

- Governance of the school is strong. There has been a recognition of the importance of linking with the community. Good work has taken place to make sure that parents, businesses, local residents and community establishments, such as homes for the elderly, are engaged and benefit from the school's facilities and resources.
- All representatives have roles closely matched to their expertise. Oversight of the school is incisive. Governors understand their responsibilities fully.
- The multi-academy trust oversees the local governing body effectively and provides good training and support. Governors appreciate being part of a larger, strategic group. They gain from sharing practice with colleagues from other trust schools.

## **Safeguarding**

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

- The principal has developed a culture that advocates personal safety and well-being for all pupils and staff. Secure processes are in place for monitoring and recording any safeguarding concerns. School leaders work well with a range of agencies, including the police and healthcare workers. Similarly, leaders work sensitively with parents and monitor and support pupils and families. Staff are trained on how to keep pupils safe from abuse, sexual exploitation, radicalisation and extremism. This further supports the health and safety of pupils within the school.

## Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

**Good**

- Teachers have high expectations and are confident in their methodology. As a result, pupils are gaining secure knowledge in subjects and building on their skill-set.
- Leaders have created a positive climate for learning on both sites and the environment is stimulating. Consequently, pupils are engaged in their studies and make good progress.
- Leaders have a clear vision of what good teaching is and have shared this with middle leaders. Coaching is used successfully by senior and middle leaders to secure good teaching in subjects. This model is also used by teachers with pupils and provides a well-informed platform for pupils to build on their learning effectively.
- Homework is an integral part of pupils' learning and develops their study habits proficiently. Leaders are rigorous in their expectations of homework being done and pupils understand this. Therefore, there are very high completion rates. This adds to pupils' subject knowledge as well as providing them with learning habits that are useful in adult life.
- Pupils develop good speaking skills as they progress through school. From the Nursery, where young children are encouraged to explain their experiences, to discussions among older students in the sixth form, teaching promotes communication in a range of forms. Articulation is used as a precursor to writing, particularly in the primary phase, with high rates of achievement with regard to description and vocabulary within extended writing.
- The teaching of phonics is much improved following intensive training for teachers and teaching assistants, and outcomes are in line with national averages this year. This has provided a more solid foundation for the development of reading and spelling within the primary phase. Pupils who struggle with reading are given continual support until their phonics skills are secure enough to help them progress further confidently. Reading aloud is promoted within tutor time and pupils, regardless of ability, are confident in this skill. Older pupils support younger ones when necessary and this develops trust as well as greater understanding. The library is well stocked and is at the centre of the school physically and academically. Pupils in the primary phase have timetabled library lessons, so that the range of books and categorisation are understood. Pupils in the secondary phase and sixth-form students make good use of the books to enhance their studies.

- Disadvantaged pupils are provided for well and profit from the good teaching throughout the school. There is no difference between their achievement and that of other pupils in the school and nationally. In English, disadvantaged pupils are doing better than their peers.
- Teachers use assessment well to measure what pupils know. Teachers use careful analysis of tests and in-class assessment to ensure that there are no gaps in pupils' knowledge. This has ensured that necessary knowledge, skills and understanding are learned by pupils. More could be done to satisfy the particular needs of pupils with different abilities, particularly the most able and the most able disadvantaged.
- The teaching of mathematics in the secondary phase is a strength. Transition work to aid primary colleagues is beginning but is not yet embedded. Teaching of mathematics in the primary phase has not developed pupils' numerical skills for them to be able to complete complex calculations sufficiently, and there is a lack of opportunity for problem solving and reasoning. In particular, this hinders the progress of the most able and the most able disadvantaged.
- Special educational needs coordinators have been appointed to ensure that pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make better progress. Pupils' particular issues are now analysed more carefully. This has led to improved communication with teachers and parents, and ensures that these pupils are supported with more effective teaching and appropriate resources.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

**Good**

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils are confident and self-assured. They feel safe, and are safe, within the school environment. They know which staff are available to sort out any problems and this allows for a smooth-running campus.
- The physical and emotional welfare of pupils is at the heart of the school's work. The very complex needs of many pupils are understood well. School leaders have worked sensitively and productively with a range of external agencies to ensure that the very best outcomes can be achieved. Most of these pupils achieve academic success and social awareness as a consequence.
- There is a large number of very vulnerable pupils in the school, of whom a high proportion have been permanently excluded from other schools. School leaders feel that a significant minority of these pupils would benefit from alternative provision, but as there are currently no places available, they manage the situation in the best way possible.
- Pupils and students understand the different forms of bullying that can take place. They are clear about what steps need to be taken as and when it happens. They spoke of the school's effective systems for dealing with its rare occurrences.
- Pupils understand aspects of how to keep themselves safe in a variety of ways, including the dangers of social media, sexting and other web communication.

- Pupils wear their uniform with pride and respect the school facilities, inside and out.
- Pupils are ready to learn, are responsive to teaching and willing to participate in lessons. Teachers are not yet providing enough opportunities for them to develop enquiry skills.
- School leaders evaluated the provision for personal, social, health and economic education and recognised that pupils were not engaged sufficiently in this area of work. Recent changes to methodology are adding to pupils' understanding and preparing them better for their next steps in life. However, there is still not enough focus on pupils' understanding of British values.
- The independent advice and guidance for pupils, particularly at the end of key stage 3, could be strengthened, with more indication of pathways to potential careers.

## Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Secondary pupils spoke of the many changes that have been made in recent years to guarantee their health and safety. Most of these are associated with the more robust measures for managing behaviour. Pupils respect the discipline promoted and enjoy the improved climate for learning within the school.
- The 'language of choice' is used skilfully within the primary phase. Pupils learn the consequences of disruption, but soon learn the benefits of behavioural compliance. This supports learning well and has been a clear determinant in the improved standards within the sites.
- Attendance is good. The poor attendance of pupils who have special educational needs has improved and is now close to the national average as a result of more rigorous monitoring systems and better planning for these pupils.
- Exclusions have been high but have reduced significantly in recent months. The high expectations and clear thresholds with regard to acceptable behaviour meant that exclusions were enforced initially to secure the better behaviour needed. The majority of pupils accept that good behaviour supports their learning and appreciate their high standards of achievement. For the few pupils who find it hard to conform, leaders balance carefully the decisions to support the greater good of the majority while protecting the individual pupil from further harm with great success.

## Outcomes for pupils

**Good**

- In most year groups, pupils are making strong progress when considering their different starting points. The development of English and mathematics is particularly good, with literacy providing a secure basis for growth.
- The sound progress of disadvantaged pupils is testament to the careful spending of funds and evaluation of what makes learning richer for them. These pupils attain academic success that secures an enhanced future for them. The extra-curricular activities make them accomplished and ready for a greater range of life experiences.

- Standards in phonics in Year 1 are improving because children are taught from Nursery upwards about the sounds that letters represent. Children’s confidence in their identification, pronunciation and reading increases continually. This preparation is very beneficial. The Nursery leader is clear about the needs of the children and has adapted teaching accordingly. The direction is less clear in Reception and children do not make as much progress. However, the improved teaching in key stage 1 allows pupils to achieve well. Valuable literacy support continues throughout the school and underpins the higher rates of achievement gained within the secondary phase and rapid improvements in the primary phase.
- The most able pupils in Year 7 are supported well through the new curriculum offer and the support of the independent sector. These pupils are thinking more deeply and being stretched in their attainment. There is less impact for the most able in other year groups.
- Outcomes in science have been lower than in other subjects. With the help of external support from the local independent school partnership, primary pupils have been introduced to scientific enquiry techniques. This has improved engagement with the subject from a younger age. More detailed analysis of better assessment practices has ensured that secondary pupils’ skills and understanding are improving. Leaders are clear that improvements in teaching and rigorous monitoring must continue.
- Inconsistent provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities has hindered some from making effective progress. Current initiatives are improving this situation because there is greater understanding of what is successful practice and of the need for higher expectations from some staff.

## Early years provision

**Good**

- Leaders have a realistic understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the early years provision. They are working with staff in Nursery and Reception to make sure that the transition between the two maximises the development of the children.
- Staff are suitably trained. They have relevant and up-to-date information on the children, which allows them to cater for the children’s needs well. Children are allocated key workers in Nursery, who oversee their academic and personal development efficiently.
- Safeguarding practices are highly effective. The sites are safe and secure. Documentation is fit for purpose and all policies are compliant with Department for Education guidelines.
- Children have access to high-quality resources. Staff use these well to aid learning. The progress of children is more rapid in the Nursery than Reception. Nursery staff direct children purposefully towards the steps necessary for transition to Reception at critical times of the year, such as the summer term. However, children in Reception are not as ready for Year 1, so some catch-up is needed in key stage 1.
- Children in Nursery develop their communication skills quickly. Equally, children are given exercises that develop fine motor skills in preparation for writing.



- The curriculum offer is developing and varied. Children access it at appropriate levels for their age. As within the rest of the school, more challenge could be offered for the most able, so that early learning goals are not just met but exceeded by more children.
- Parents' engagement with their children's learning is increasing through meetings at school, home visits and drop-in sessions. Learning is modelled to parents of children in Nursery, so that support can be further enhanced when children return home. This enables the children to make swifter progress towards a good level of development.
- Children in Nursery are motivated well in their learning by staff. Children demonstrate a willingness to sustain a task over a period of time or until an activity ceases appropriately.
- Children are safe. Behaviour is good generally. When children become over boisterous, adults handle the situation well and modify behaviour effectively.
- Disadvantaged pupils are achieving as well as others, and sometimes better, which is reflected in the achievement of disadvantaged pupils in the rest of the school.
- Development in reading and writing is slower than other goals but improvements can be seen in both Reception and Nursery. More children are achieving a good level of development and outcomes are in line with national averages, which shows good progress from children's starting points.
- Children in Reception maintain focus when doing an activity that is directed by staff. However, some children are not able to sustain concentration when left to their own choices and flit from one activity to another without any purposeful outcome.

## 16 to 19 study programmes

**Good**

- Leadership of the sixth form is strong. Recent developments have secured better progress for students attending the sixth form. Equally, more has been done to raise expectations of pupils in school so that the numbers attending are increasing. This fulfils the promise of an all-through school.
- In 2016, outcomes in academic subjects were in line with national averages. This represents continual incremental improvement in students' learning. This is because of effective teaching in the sixth form with teachers becoming more used to the syllabuses and changes to the curriculum. Students do even better at vocational courses and relish the practical elements. There is no significant difference between any groups of students with regard to progress and attainment.
- Attendance is very good and above national averages overall, and for disadvantaged students and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Students take pride in their achievements and enjoy coming to the sixth form.
- Disadvantaged students perform as well as others in the sixth form and, as with secondary pupils, benefit from the strong teaching.

- Gradually, more students are coming to the sixth form from the secondary phase on site. This is because of improved standards and achievement in the secondary phase. Students' self-belief and aptitude for study are making further education a genuine choice for them. Retention between Year 12 and Year 13 is very high, with very few students leaving at the end of Year 12.
- The academic curriculum is broad and varied and complemented by the personal, social, health and economic education that provides students with a wider understanding of the world in the 21st century. Students are aware of how to keep themselves safe online, including being aware of the influences of extremism.
- Students are respectful and well behaved. They take leadership roles seriously, and this benefits younger pupils as well as their peers. Students support a wide range of activities in the school, such as sports, performances, musical accomplishment and reading.
- The sixth form hosts a sports academy for over 200 students who participate in coaching at regional football stadiums. The attendance, safety and well-being of these students off site are monitored rigorously. Students are engaged in productive learning when in the school sixth form.
- Students feel safe on- and off the site because of the good systems that are in place to ensure this.
- Although work experience is offered to all students, there is inconsistent uptake, with more students on vocational courses taking up placements. This limits potential experiences for some of the most able students.
- More students are moving on to higher education now, including attendance at Russell Group universities because of improved academic achievement. However, the number of students who do not go on to education, training or employment is higher than the national average. Although individual support takes place to guide students into opportunities before they leave, more needs to be done to lessen the figures of students without future security. Not enough purposeful direction or monitoring of uptake of independent advice and guidance is done. Similarly, follow-up procedures to see whether students have sustained their places beyond school need to be more rigorous.
- Results for students re-taking level 2 qualifications in English and mathematics have improved. Students are given more hours of teaching, which is monitored well, but too few students gain the passes required to provide a springboard for better opportunities in the workplace or by further study.

## School details

Unique reference number	135364
Local authority	Swindon
Inspection number	10024933

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

Type of school	All-through
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	2 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,793
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	306
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sir Anthony Greener
Principal	Ruth Robinson
Telephone number	01793 426900
Website	<a href="http://www.swindon-academy.org">www.swindon-academy.org</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:Ruth.Robinson@swindon-academy.org">Ruth.Robinson@swindon-academy.org</a>
Date of previous inspection	5–6 February 2015

## Information about this school

- The school meets the Department for Education's definition of a coasting school based on key stage 2 academic performance results in 2014, 2015 and 2016.
- The school does not meet requirements on the publication of information about Year 7 catch-up funding on its website.
- The school complies with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish.
- Swindon Academy is sponsored by United Learning Trust.

- Swindon Academy is larger than the average-sized school. It is built on two sites. One site has pupils from age two to 19 and the other has pupils from age two to 11.
- The proportion of pupils supported by pupil premium funding is above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is above the national average, as is the proportion who have an education, health and care plan.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress at key stage 4 and for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Year 6.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited lessons, many jointly with senior leaders.
- A wide sample of pupils' work, from all year groups and in a range of subjects, was scrutinised.
- Inspectors talked with groups of pupils from key stages 1 to 5, as well as with pupils informally across the site.
- Meetings were held with the principal, heads of phase and middle leaders, members of the governing body and trustees.
- Documentary and other types of information were evaluated, including evidence relating to safeguarding, assessment, school evaluation and external reviews.
- Inspectors took account of the 36 responses and 23 comments in the online Parent View survey, the parent survey undertaken by the school and the 173 responses to the staff online survey.

## Inspection team

Kathy Maddocks, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Paul Smith	Ofsted Inspector
Paul Nicholson	Ofsted Inspector
Tracy Harris	Ofsted Inspector
Alan Johnson	Ofsted Inspector
Paula Marsh	Ofsted Inspector

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