

The King Alfred School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123879
Local Authority	Somerset
Inspection number	359539
Inspection dates	3–4 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Tony Shield

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
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1380
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	121
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs C Burnett
Headteacher	Mr A Owen
Date of previous school inspection	18 September 2007
School address	Burnham Road Somerset TA9 3EE
Telephone number	01278784881
Fax number	01278 782344
Email address	sch.514@educ.somerset.gov.uk

Age group	11–18
Inspection dates	3–4 March 2011
Inspection number	359539

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the documentation in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA

T: 0300 123 4234

Textphone: 0161 618 8524

E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

© Crown copyright 2011

Introduction

This inspection was carried out by five additional inspectors. They visited 37 lessons or parts of lessons and 36 teachers were observed. Inspectors held meetings with members of the governing body, members of staff and students. They observed the school's work, and looked at a range of school documentation, including the self-evaluation form, safeguarding and other policy documents, the school development plan and records of students' progress. In reaching their judgements, they took into account the views of 66 parents and carers, in addition to those of students and staff, expressed in questionnaires.

The inspectors reviewed many aspects of the school's work. They looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- The extent of any variation in progress across different subjects and whether the progress of most students is better than satisfactory.
- The extent to which teaching and the curriculum challenge and meet the needs of all students.
- Evidence that the school has made sustained improvements in outcomes since the last inspection, particularly in English.
- The contribution of the school's specialism and of leaders and managers at all levels to school improvement.
- How successfully the school is tackling the issue of underperformance in the sixth form.

Information about the school

The King Alfred School is a larger-than-average school serving Highbridge and the area beyond. The school is a specialist sports college. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities in the school is just below average and there are very few students from minority ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. A new headteacher was appointed in April 2010.

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

This is a satisfactory school, and one that is improving rapidly. The driving force behind this recent improvement has been the ambitious and determined leadership of the headteacher and his senior team. They have taken decisive action to improve provision, raise expectations, and remove some of the inconsistencies in the quality of teaching. Improvements in behaviour and the climate for learning are marked and leading to more rapid progress for most students. Much remains to be done, but the school is moving decisively in the right direction. The school's detailed analysis of students' academic performance is the bedrock for secure self-evaluation. The school knows exactly what needs to be done and has set out a clear way forward in its development plan. While the governing body and staff recognise the challenge ahead, there is a strong sense of shared purpose and teamwork which, given all that has already been achieved, indicates that the school has a good capacity to improve further.

There are a number of key strengths and some areas for continuing improvement.

- Students have an exceptionally well-developed sense of their responsibilities to the community, both within the school and the wider local community.
- Students feel safe in the school's caring and supportive environment. Some very close work with external partners helps ensure the well-being of vulnerable students
- The school's sports specialism helps encourage most students to have an outstanding awareness of how to lead a healthy lifestyle through active participation in sports and a healthy diet.
- There is a rising trend in students' attainment, but attainment in English is a barrier to more rapid progress. While progress overall is satisfactory, it is improving strongly as the impact of measures taken to improve learning is felt. In some subjects, most notably history, progress is good. The progress of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is good
- Behaviour in lessons is good. Students' good attitudes to learning make a vital contribution to their progress. While attendance is broadly average, for a small number of students, poor attendance impacts on their learning.
- The school works effectively to communicate with parents and carers and to listen to their views through regular surveys and other means. This has helped generate an increasing sense of shared partnership to get the best for all students.
- The well-planned, flexible curriculum takes account of changing needs and encourages students to develop their personal skills well. There is an extensive range of extra-curricular and enrichment opportunities.

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

- Much teaching observed was good, but teaching overall is judged satisfactory because there is still some variability in the quality of learning. Not all lessons use information about how well students are doing to adapt tasks and set work which challenges individual students at the right level. Marking is sometimes mechanistic and not helpful enough in moving the learning on. The encouragement of students to be more active in their learning, and develop independent learning skills, is inconsistent across subjects. Some questioning misses opportunities to extend students' thinking.
- In the sixth form, teaching, the curriculum and student outcomes are improving. There has been a noticeable change as measures to improve academic performance take effect, but monitoring of provision is not consistently rigorous. Sixth formers are good role models for the school.
- The school's ambition is evident in the robust leadership of the headteacher, his senior team and committed subject and year leaders. Leadership through the school has been strengthened and the school is poised to move forward strongly. As one parent commented, 'Since the new headteacher was appointed, there seems to be a real feeling of positivity around the school.'



Up to 40% of schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment overall, particularly in English, and increase the proportion of students who achieve both English and mathematics at GCSE by:
 - eliminating inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and learning and making sure that tasks in lessons are tailored more precisely to individual needs
 - ensuring feedback and marking is used to help students move their learning on
 - using questions more consistently to get pupils to extend and deepen their understanding and think for themselves
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to investigate, solve problems on their own and develop active learning skills.
- Improve learning and progress in the sixth form by:
 - sharpening the rigour with which teaching and learning is monitored in the sixth form, and ensuring consistently high-quality intervention across different subjects.
- Improve attendance for a small number of students for whom this is a barrier to learning.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Students make satisfactory progress overall, although it is improving. Against almost all measures, GCSE performance has been improving steadily in recent years, but a dip in 2010 in both English and mathematics bucked this trend. As a result, and despite some

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

good results in some subjects such as design and technology, history, French and statistics, the proportion of students achieving five or more A* to C grades, including English and mathematics, dropped. The school's response to these disappointing results has been effective in ensuring that students make better progress this year. Early entry results for the current Year 11 indicate a stronger picture of improvement. Work seen by inspectors confirms the picture of broadly average attainment and of satisfactory, although sometimes better, progress. The progress of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is more consistently good because of good support and well-targeted interventions.

Students have positive attitudes and enjoy their learning. The school's promotion of student leadership through its 'Learning to Lead' initiative is singularly effective.

As a result, an increasingly confident student body is pushing for change at both classroom and whole-school level. The school council is vociferous in its action to provide a safe road crossing for students and, as the chair of the school council says, 'We won't give up!' In this respect, and in their work with the wider and international community, students make an outstanding contribution. Students recognise the importance of a healthy lifestyle and many participate enthusiastically in the wide range of sporting activities. Attendance is average overall, despite the determined efforts of the school to work in partnership with parents and carers and external agencies to improve the attendance of a few students. Students respond well to the school's promotion of workplace skills. They are good at working together in teams and in listening and building on each other's ideas. In addition, students use basic skills, including computer skills, well across the curriculum, although there is more to be done to embed good practice in reading and numeracy in different subjects. Students are curious, tolerant and have a good understanding of cultural differences and of what it means to live in a multi-faith society. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good.

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

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	3
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	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

How effective is the provision?

While teaching is satisfactory and sometimes good, it is inconsistent. Students and parents and carers made this point to inspectors. At its best, teaching is inspiring, thoroughly planned and founded on trusting and good relationships with students. In a particularly effective Year 7 gymnastics lesson, students worked with considerable autonomy and responsibility to develop their ideas. The teacher communicated her ideas confidently, intervening only to nudge the learning forward. Where learning is active in this way, students respond with energy and participate enthusiastically. Learning of this kind, which gives students responsibility for organising their time and ideas, is particularly effective. However, not all teaching is of this quality. Nevertheless, the school, through its recent appointment of a learning and teaching coordinator, is working with increasing success to share good practice.

Important changes to the curriculum, such as increasing the time students spend on GCSE courses, and the introduction of a 'learning to learn' programme ('Stripes') in every subject, have promoted a more flexible and personal curriculum. There is a good balance between vocational and academic courses and a good partnership with external providers ensures the work-related curriculum is well considered. This has enabled students to select a combination of courses that meet their needs more closely. Learning Outside the Curriculum (LOTG) is extensive, and an exciting range of visits, visitors and clubs helps

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

ensure the impact of the curriculum as a whole on students' personal development is good. ♦

A significant strength is the care and guidance for students. Students are well known as individuals and a committed team of pastoral managers have, in their own words, 'a genuine concern for the young people and give extra time to support them making the most of themselves'. Extensive partnerships with a range of external agencies complement a proactive approach to supporting students, especially those most vulnerable and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Students are given good guidance to enable them to make confident and well-informed choices at important stages in their school career.

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?

An ambitious path has been set and adopted by all. The school has developed a comprehensive system for measuring performance and is using this well to plan interventions for those at risk of underachievement. Rigorous target setting is asking more of individual students and reflects higher expectations of what they can achieve. The governing body demonstrates a determined commitment to play a full part in the challenge of raising students' achievements. It is very supportive and assiduous in carrying out its statutory responsibilities, but it is still developing its strategic role in challenging the school's leadership.

The promotion of equal opportunities is good and the school carefully tracks the performance of both individuals and groups. A number of identified groups, including students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, and the small number of pupils from ethnic minorities, make better progress than many others. The school is also targeting its so-called 'invisible students', that is those who may not be doing as well as they might because they do not stand out. As a result, there is a narrowing of the gap between different groups in the school. Procedures to ensure the safeguarding of students are good. Safeguarding policies, procedures and training are fully in place, and are subject to regular review to ensure compliance with regulations. The school does much to promote community cohesion, having carried out an extensive audit of its context and developed an action plan to promote, in particular, students' awareness of cultural and faith diversity. Extensive international links, visits and exchanges ensure the school is at the hub of some imaginatively planned experiences. The school has made a particular success of its status as a specialist sports college, has developed strong partnerships with

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

local schools and uses the additional resources wisely to support innovation across the school.

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	3
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	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Sixth form

In recent years, students' academic outcomes from the sixth form have been disappointing, particularly in the number of students reaching A/B grades. The school has restructured the management of the sixth form, and taken action to secure improvements. Already, there are secure signs of improvement, particularly for the current Year 13. However, monitoring is not consistently rigorous across different subjects. The school prides itself on its open access and students are making satisfactory progress given their starting points on entry. An increasingly personal curriculum ensures courses are geared to the needs of both academic students and those for whom vocational courses are more suitable. An extensive enrichment programme is a considerable strength. While there is some strong teaching with effective and productive relationships between teachers and students, this is not consistent, and opportunities for tutorial-style, collaborative discussions are sometimes not fully exploited. Staff know their students well and students appreciate the level of care and guidance which supports them throughout their course and helps them think about their future choices. Revised line management arrangements have considerably strengthened the leadership of the sixth form and ensure that it is satisfactorily led. ♦

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

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

Responses were received from 66 parents and carers, a much lower than average response. Those responding are generally supportive of the school and a very large majority are happy with their child's experience at The King Alfred School. Almost all are confident that their children are safe, and most believe they are making enough progress and that the school keeps them informed. There were many supportive comments, although some parents and carers added some negative comments, in particular in relation to the variable quality of teaching, something with which the inspection team agrees. A small number of parents and carers felt there was some disruptive behaviour, but inspectors found no evidence to endorse this during this inspection.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at The King Alfred School 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 66 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1380 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	24	36	37	56	4	6	1	2
The school keeps my child safe	27	41	38	58	0	0	1	2
My school informs me about my child's progress	25	38	37	56	0	0	1	2
My child is making enough progress at this school	23	35	34	52	7	11	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	15	23	38	58	7	11	2	3
The school helps me to support my child's learning	14	21	37	56	7	11	2	3
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	10	15	40	61	10	15	2	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)	18	27	36	55	8	12	1	2
The school meets my child's particular needs	21	32	36	55	5	8	1	2
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	12	18	42	64	7	11	3	5
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	16	24	41	62	1	2	4	6
The school is led and managed effectively	23	35	35	53	2	3	2	3
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	30	45	30	45	1	2	4	6

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 all 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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

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 are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

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 pupils' 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.



7 March 2011



Dear Students



Inspection of The King Alfred School, Highbridge TA9 3EE



Thank you for welcoming us to your school during our recent inspection. We enjoyed meeting and talking with you. We were particularly impressed by the sensible and responsible way in which you contribute to both the school and the wider community. The King Alfred School is a satisfactory and improving school. Here are some of the other main findings from our report.



- Teachers take good care to ensure you are well looked after in both your personal and academic needs.
- You are doing better at school, but this still varies between subjects and there is room for even more improvement, particularly in English. Your good behaviour and positive attitudes are key factors in the improving progress you are making.
- Teaching which gets you to think for yourself and be involved actively in the learning is the most successful. However, not all teaching is of this quality. We have asked the school to make sure these inconsistencies are ironed out and that every teacher sets work at the right level for each of you. We also want feedback to let you know how well you are doing and what you might do to improve.
- The curriculum is wide ranging and there is a good range of clubs and enrichment activities, particularly in sport. This helps ensure that you have an exceptionally good understanding of what it takes to lead a healthy lifestyle.
- The school links well with your parents and carers and with other agencies to ensure you get the best out of school.
- In the sixth form, things are improving, although up to now, too few of you have reached the high standards of which you are capable. We have asked the school to check what is going on more rigorously.
- Many of you develop confident personal and social skills, helping to prepare you for your future beyond school.

- The headteacher and leaders and managers at all levels carry out their responsibilities well and are determined to ensure that you achieve as well as you possibly can. All of you can certainly help by continuing to work hard and striving for the best.



Thank you once again for your help during our visit, and best wishes for your futures.



Yours sincerely



Tony Shield

Lead inspector

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.