

Altwood Church of England Secondary School

Altwood Road, Maidenhead, SL6 4PU

Inspection dates 2–3 May 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- The proportion of the school's students who achieved 5 A* to C grades including English and mathematics has been below national averages for two years. Although these cohorts had well below average starting points in basic skills, some students did not make enough progress in English and science.
- A minority of teachers do not use all the available information about students' abilities to provide work that stretches every individual. As a result, a number of students of all abilities do not make as much progress as they could.
- Teachers' marking of students' work is not always effective enough at helping students understand the level they are working at and how to improve. Teachers also do not always check that students respond to their guidance.
- The quality of teaching is too variable across subjects and year groups and, as a result, students make inconsistent progress in some subjects and year groups.

The school has the following strengths

- Achievement is improving strongly at Key Stage 4 because leaders have improved the quality of teaching in a range of subjects through effective checks on teaching and appropriate training.
- The sixth form is good because it provides a broad range of courses and students achieve well as a result of clear advice and guidance and good teaching.
- Students behave well in lessons and are eager to learn. They conduct themselves sensibly when moving around the school. Students feel safe and attend well. Attendance is above average.
- The headteacher and senior staff provide determined leadership resulting in improvements in students' achievement, behaviour and attendance. Leaders and governors have a good understanding of how well the school is performing.
- The school offers a broad range of subjects at each Key Stage so that students' aptitudes and interests are catered for well as is their social, spiritual, moral and cultural development.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 43 lessons, of which six were joint observations with senior leaders. In addition, the inspection team made a number of shorter visits to lessons to look at specific aspects of students' work.
- Meetings were held with school staff, including middle leaders and senior leaders, four groups of students and representatives of the governing body.
- Inspectors took account of the 71 responses to the online parent questionnaire (Parent View) and other communications with parents, such as e-mails and letters, which helped inspectors to focus on particular aspects of the school's work.
- Forty one staff questionnaires were received and inspectors considered the responses.
- They observed the work of the school, spoke informally with students and looked at a number of documents, including how the school manages and improves teaching and decides on pay. Records relating to attendance and behaviour, together with minutes of governors' meetings and documents relating to safeguarding, were also examined.

Inspection team

Simon Blackburn, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Ann Short	Additional Inspector
Jalil Shaikh	Additional Inspector
Gordon Jackson	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a smaller than average secondary school.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for additional funding through the pupil premium is well below the national average.
- The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is just above the national average as is the proportion of students identified as speaking English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils supported through school action is well above the national average but the proportion supported through school action plus or who have a statement of special educational needs is close to the national average.
- The school provides alternative provision in the form of work-related education for some of its Year 10 and 11 students through a range of local providers and agencies.
- The school meets current government floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- Altwood Church of England Secondary School converted to become an academy school on 1 July 2012. When its predecessor school of the same name was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be good.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of teaching that is good and outstanding and speed up the pupils' rate of progress, particularly in English and science, by:
 - continuing to share the best practice that exists in the school across all subjects
 - using fully the knowledge of each student's earlier learning from marking and assessments to provide work that is challenging
 - providing more information about the levels at which students are working and setting clear expectations about expected progress in all lessons.
- Improve the quality of feedback to students by:
 - ensuring that every student receives regular feedback that provides clear guidance on how to improve their work
 - regularly checking that students act on the feedback provided.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Achievement requires improvement because not all students make good enough progress. Although the two year groups that took GCSE examinations in 2011 and 2012 had well below average starting points on joining the school, some pupils underachieved, particularly in English and science last year. This was reflected in the below average proportion of students gaining five or more higher GCSE grades, including English and mathematics, in 2012
- Results from recent examinations taken by students in Key Stage 4 indicate that there is a strongly improving picture of achievement. Evidence from lessons and from students' books shows that they are now making better progress as a result of improved teaching, particularly in English and science.
- Progress of some groups of students, for example those supported by the pupil premium, has also improved. Most of these students make progress at the same rate as other students in the school and some make faster progress, with the result that gaps in attainment are closing over time.
- The school recognises that it has a large number of students supported at school action and it is reviewing its assessment policy in this area. These students and other students with disabilities or who have special educational needs were observed to make progress which is similar to that of other students. The school's tracking data shows that their progress is variable across subjects and year groups.
- Students from minority ethnic backgrounds and those who are identified as speaking English as an additional language make progress at a similar rate to all other students.
- Students' literacy skills are developing well as a result of the school's sharp focus on punctuation and grammar. Students read in many subjects across the curriculum and do so with confidence and fluency. Students are given the opportunity to develop their skills in communication and mathematics in many subjects.
- Learning and progress in the sixth form are good as a result of the high level of individual challenge presented to students. Students in Years 10 and 11 who attend work-related courses off the school's site achieve well, as their progress and attendance are monitored closely by school leaders.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- The quality of teaching in the school is too variable. Although inspectors saw examples of good and outstanding teaching, some teaching observed did not support good student progress. While teaching is improving rapidly in some subjects, for example English and science, there is still variation within these subjects.
- In some lessons, teachers do not set work that challenges all students and they teach lessons that are best suited to middle ability students. As a result, too many students do not make all the progress they could because they either find work too difficult or not demanding enough.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is strong and, in the best lessons, this is combined with real enthusiasm and dynamic delivery to motivate and inspire students. In a Year 10 English lesson, the teacher ensured that students made rapid progress in writing a speech by challenging students with slightly different tasks for three different levels of ability. This resulted in a rapid pace and ensured all the key vocabulary was understood through effective questioning.
- The quality of questioning used by teachers is a stronger feature of teaching and students' understanding was tested thoroughly by questions well matched to their ability. Students are given an increasing number of opportunities to work independently and in small groups so that they learn from their mistakes and develop resilience.
- In the best assessment and marking seen, students received very detailed feedback which also required them to consider and respond to the teacher's guidance or to extend their learning through more challenging tasks. However, this level of challenge and reflection is not consistent

across or within subjects. Much of the marking and assessment does not give students any clear idea of the level of their work or how, precisely, to improve. Teachers also do not regularly check that students have acted on previous feedback and the result of this is that sometimes mistakes are repeated.

- Teaching in the sixth form is good. Students recognise the value of the smaller groups they are taught in and teachers are able to exploit this to pose challenging questions and set demanding tasks. In an outstanding Year 13 history lesson, students worked in teams to prepare a speaker for brief competitive debates which pitted differing theories of political control against one another. Students were highly motivated and learned very rapidly.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- During the inspection, students behaved very well around the school. They showed courtesy and good manners to visitors, staff and to one another. In lessons, students have positive attitudes to learning, arriving punctually and settling to work quickly. School records show that this is typical behaviour.
- Attendance is above average. The school works very effectively with families to ensure that there are improvements in attendance of the small number of students whose absence is persistent.
- The use of fixed-term exclusion has reduced year on year and is now below the national average. Students understand and respect the behaviour code and feel that it is effective in ensuring that learning is not disrupted.
- Students understand the different forms of bullying and how to keep themselves safe. They say that there are very few cases of bullying because the school takes it very seriously.
- Students take responsibility for representing the views of their peers on a range of councils; the school council, Olympic council and the ideas council present student ideas to the senior leaders. Students feel that their views are listened to and respected.
- The school has effective systems to monitor the attendance, behaviour and safety of the small number of students who pursue work experience placements in the community as part of their curriculum. As a result of their placements and the excellent support offered by the 'achievement centre' team, these students make good progress when in school.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher and her leadership team have high ambitions for the school. Their decisive actions have led to some clear improvements in teaching and achievement, particularly in science and English. High standards of behaviour have been maintained.
- Senior leaders and the governing body have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school through well-structured self-evaluation activities. Checks on learning in lessons are carried out rigorously by senior and middle managers and identify how teaching should improve. Needs are carefully identified and a programme of support is provided through the school's own 'lead practitioners' and external training. A culture of sharing what works well in teaching is well established and helps to improve relatively weaker teaching but it is not yet having consistent impact across the school.
- Heads of subjects and other middle leaders share the headteacher's ambitious vision for the school and provide strong leadership that ensures initiatives are put into action consistently across the school and that areas of weaker performance are tackled quickly. They foster the culture of sharing what works well and are relentless in pursuing improvements.
- Performance management is rigorous. Targets for improvement ensure that teachers are held to account for the quality of their teaching and students' results. Movement on pay scales is closely related to the achievement of these targets.

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- The school's self-evaluation is wide-ranging and generally accurate. It provides a valuable working analysis of what is going well and what needs improvement. These relative weaknesses are then the subject of detailed and well-structured plans that offer the senior and subject leaders clear direction and high expectations.
 - The range of subjects on offer for all age groups is broad, balanced and comprehensive. It provides a wealth of experiences that contribute to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development at all key stages and is carefully adjusted for students who have particular needs or who need more work-related experiences. The 'pathways' models used at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form are well understood and ensure that students' chosen courses are well matched to their abilities.
 - The school's leaders, including governors, have a clear strategy for the support allocated to students known to be eligible for the pupil premium. From the money allocated, the school funds the Raising Achievement Team which supports eligible students with literacy and numeracy learning so they can progress more rapidly in all lessons. It also helps to fund Easter revision programmes and a supervised after-hours study club. The Year 7 Catch-up Premium funding is used to support summer schools to help students improve their literacy and numeracy skills before they start at the school. There is already clear evidence that eligible students are making better progress as a result of these decisions and some are now making progress at a faster rate than other students.
 - The sixth form is well led and managed. Students report that they are given excellent advice and guidance at all points in their sixth form career and particularly appreciate the frequent and regular one-to-one support and challenge they receive from their tutors.
 - Safeguarding arrangements meet statutory requirements.
 - **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors have a clear picture of how well the school is doing against local and national benchmarks. They are fully aware of the areas of relative weakness and express a determination to support the headteacher and her senior team in eradicating these. For example, governors highlighted the steps they had taken to challenge the school about the poor results in science over recent years. Governors are acutely aware of their role in holding the school to account in all areas of its work and are reviewing the systems they use to gather and interpret evidence to ensure they always get the full picture. Governors know how the pupil premium is spent and the impact it is having and they understand the role performance management is playing in improving teaching.
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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	138342
Local authority	Windsor and Maidenhead
Inspection number	412788

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Secondary School
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	834
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	115
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sheila Baker
Headteacher	Kathleen Higgins
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected.
Telephone number	01628 622236
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