

Altwood CofE Secondary School

Altwood Road, Maidenhead, Berkshire SL6 4PU

Inspection dates

11–12 October 2017

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Over time, school leaders have established a culture where expectations of what pupils can achieve have been lifted. Recently, this has resulted in improved teaching, learning and assessment.
- Middle leaders are keen and enthusiastic. They contribute well to improving the school by ensuring that their actions address whole-school priorities.
- Governors provide a good balance of support and challenge to school leaders. They ensure that the right areas for improvement are the focus of development plans.
- Pupils' behaviour is good. Positive relationships between pupils and with adults permeate the school. Pupils' personal development is a strength of the school.
- Pastoral leaders know pupils well. The organisational change to mixed-age tutor groups has been successful in strengthening how effectively all pupils are supported.
- Pupils and parents are positive about the support that the school provides, including for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe is effective.
- The curriculum prepares pupils suitably for the next stage of their education, training or employment, and for life in modern Britain. However, it is still not challenging enough to ensure that the most able consistently fulfil their potential and succeed academically.
- In the past, less effective teaching meant that pupils did not achieve as well as they should have. Now, most teachers plan activities that suitably challenge and interest pupils, enabling them to make good progress.
- Occasionally, where learning is not carefully planned and resourced, pupils lose focus and make less rapid progress.
- Pupil premium funding has been used well to improve literacy skills in Years 7 to 9.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are making improved progress from their starting points. This is because their learning programmes suit their needs well.
- In the sixth form, students now make better progress than in the past, as teaching is demanding more of them. Many rise well to those challenges.
- Attendance has improved and is now in line with the national average. However, rates of absence for some disadvantaged pupils are too high and this hinders their progress.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that curriculum plans and resources across subjects and key stages meet the needs of different groups of learners precisely.
- Make sure that teaching consistently challenges all pupils to achieve their very best by deepening their knowledge, skills and understanding.
- Accelerate the progress of the most able pupils so that more of them attain the highest examination grades by the end of key stage 4 than has been the case in the past.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher's strong and clear vision, which is highly aspirational, permeates the school. As a result, the school's values of compassion, ambition, understanding and respect are evident. Pupils are well prepared to actively and positively engage in the world around them. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is assured.
- The restructuring of the senior leadership team has improved the capacity for further developments well. It has led to clear lines of communication and accountability for key aspects of the school that are priorities for improvement. The effectiveness of the leaders' approach to improving the quality of teaching was evident during this inspection. Nevertheless, senior leaders know that further improving consistency of practice remains essential.
- The work undertaken in the past year to improve the skills of middle leaders has had a positive effect on their leadership work. Middle leaders work well together and take their responsibilities to raise achievement for all pupils very seriously. They monitor the quality of teaching, and support their teams to continuously improve. As a result, teaching across the school is now good. It has improved rapidly in the recent past, despite several changes in staffing last year.
- A more sustained approach to raising pupils' aspirations and improving teaching is evident across the school, with senior leaders taking a robust lead. The school's own monitoring records reflect this, indicating that the management of other leaders has improved well.
- In addition, senior leaders have made good use of the effective critical support from the improvement partner and the local diocesan board of education. This carefully targeted guidance has strengthened leadership and resulted in improving teaching and behaviour across the school.
- Pupils enjoy the enrichment opportunities available to them, which are well attended. Leaders ensure that disadvantaged pupils are supported so that they can participate fully in extra-curricular activities. Sports and drama clubs are especially well attended.
- Pupils appreciate the large number of trips they are offered. For example, visits both in Britain and abroad enhance pupils' learning. Opportunities to support local and national charities are very apparent. Growing numbers of pupils also take part in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme every year. Such experiences deepen pupils' understanding of the topics they learn about in school, as well as broadening their horizons and ambitions. Consequently, pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- Leaders' targeted actions are improving the outcomes of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Reading and writing programmes have been used to improve pupils' skills well. Year 7 pupils particularly benefit from additional support to improve their literacy and numeracy skills, because of well-targeted use of catch-up funding.
- Leaders' evaluation of the pupil premium use in 2016 is detailed and comprehensive. Leaders identify which strategies are most successful, and aim to build on those to help accelerate the progress of disadvantaged pupils. In particular, the actions taken to

promote better attendance have been positive, as have those designed to boost overall performance in English and mathematics of younger pupils.

- Staff and pupils speak highly of the quality and effectiveness of leadership. They recognise how much leaders have done to improve and develop the school.
- Leaders judge the school to be good, but recognise that a further range of improvements are still needed. Inspectors agree with this view, as better rates of progress by pupils seen now were not fully evident in last year's GCSE outcomes. The school action plan has appropriate priorities but does not have sharp enough criteria for leaders and governors to track the success of the plan fully. This is being rectified.
- A minority of parents are not yet confident that the school provides good enough opportunities for their children. However, a sizeable majority of parents support the school well, as seen in Parent View and from discussions with parents, who are recognising how the school has improved in the recent past. One commented: 'My daughter enjoys the learning here so much, as she has good opportunities to do well.'
- The curriculum is broadly balanced, with an increased focus on problem-solving and factual recall in some subjects. The 'Thinking Hard' development is becoming more effective. But, in several subjects, overall planning does not detail the resources, adaptations or teaching approaches needed to meet the needs of all learners, especially the most able. This is more evident in key stage 4. However, good attention is paid to offering more vocational courses to those pupils who will benefit.

Governance of the school

- Governors have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They are actively involved in securing the continuing improvements in all aspects of the school's life.
- Governors check carefully the actions leaders take to improve pupils' achievement. They were disappointed with the initial progress information from the provisional 2017 GCSE outcomes. However, they have already challenged leaders to provide more stringent actions for improvement, which their own 'education committee' is monitoring.
- The governors fully supported the headteacher's actions to tackle ineffective teaching. Governors hold school leaders to account well and ask increasingly challenging questions in meetings. This has contributed well to improvements in the overall quality of teaching and learning throughout the school.
- Governors are knowledgeable about the school's performance management arrangements and thoroughly investigate decisions taken by leaders about performance-related pay.
- The governing body provides useful notes of its visits to school leaders to check on progress against the improvement-planning documents. Governors ensure that safeguarding arrangements meet requirements.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

- Leaders are robust in monitoring and following up concerns about pupils' well-being. They maintain effective records and revisit concerns to ensure that actions are taken to support pupils. Leaders are rigorous in pursuing effective help for pupils. They welcome advice and guidance and routinely discuss matters of concern with the local support agencies. This ensures that appropriate safeguarding measures are put in place.
- All staff at the school have received basic training in safeguarding and in the government's 'Prevent' duty programme. The ongoing safeguarding training programme goes beyond this to ensure that staff have the skills to support pupils with other concerns, such as anxiety and depression.
- Pupils feel safe and are taught how to keep themselves safe online. Parents also feel that pupils are safe.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Leaders have focused on the weaknesses in teaching identified at the last inspection. One pupil remarked, 'Teaching has got much better since new teachers came.' The quality of teaching has improved over the recent past so that the overall quality is now good.
- Relationships between adults and pupils are positive. The vast majority of staff have high expectations of their pupils. Pupils are very keen to learn and are eager to do well. Many take great pride in their work. The work in pupils' books is well presented. This matches the attitudes to learning observed and the progress seen.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning are positive in most lessons. Should a pupil not quite cope with a teacher's expectations, adults skilfully help them to refocus on their learning and encourage them successfully to 'try'.
- Homework plays an important role in improving pupils' understanding. Teachers set homework activities which match pupils' needs and consolidate their learning. Pupils told the inspectors that they find their homework helpful.
- In a growing majority of lessons, teachers' planning does provide challenge, and activities are well matched to pupils' needs. In these lessons, teachers use questioning well to probe pupils' knowledge and understanding. The 'Thinking Hard' approach was seen in French and Spanish lessons, where pupils had to use newly learned vocabulary in a different context. Pupils achieved well because of the challenge provided.
- Pupils make good use of the feedback teachers provide to improve their knowledge, skills and understanding. This is strongly and consistently evident in English, history, art, drama and modern foreign languages. However, at times, the school policy is not followed carefully enough. Teachers' comments sometimes lack precision, and so individual pupils do not make as rapid progress as they could.
- Pupils told the inspectors that they appreciate the time teachers give them to improve their work. This was observed to be particularly effective during a Year 7 English lesson. Pupils made good use of the time they were given to correct their misconceptions about the alternative fairy tale 'Cinderfella'. On occasions, feedback elsewhere is not used well enough to extend pupils' learning.
- The most able pupils have not always made the progress expected. Although progress

has accelerated, expectation and challenge need to be higher on a more consistent basis. This year, more teachers have higher expectations of the most able pupils than in the past, but leaders know that this needs further work to have a consistent impact on the progress of most-able pupils.

- Teachers respond to pupils' misconceptions skilfully and reshape questions and explanations to maximise pupils' progress. While this is a growing strength, not all teachers are yet developing this aspect of their work well enough.

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 proud of their school and the opportunities it provides for them. Staff cater well for pupils' physical and emotional well-being. Most parents are very positive about the care that their children receive while at school. Pupils recognise and appreciate the improvements brought about over the last year in the school, particularly the move to cross-age tutor groups. These were seen to be successful in encouraging older pupils to work closely with younger ones, often acting as good role models.
- Pupils respond positively to the school's work to keep them safe. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe online and are aware of how to manage risk outside school. For example, pupils have found information they have been given about alcohol, drugs and healthy relationships to be especially useful.
- Pupils are knowledgeable about the different types of bullying and show confidence in the effective way the school deals with any incidents of bullying. The curriculum for personal development has ensured that pupils do not tolerate racism or homophobia. Pupils are adamant that discrimination has no place in the school.
- Pupils welcome how the personal development curriculum encourages them to know, understand and exercise safely their rights and personal freedoms. This has a positive impact on pupils' values.
- The Altwood Parliament provides pupils with the opportunity to air opinions, discuss school issues and provide school leaders with their views. This is welcomed and enjoyed by those involved and understood by many others as an effective way of learning about democracy in practice.
- Pupils receive effective careers education and guidance throughout the school and this is helping to raise the aspirations of pupils. The useful links with a range of different providers, including local businesses, enhance this provision. Because of strong guidance, almost all pupils from the school move on to appropriate further education, employment or training. School leaders are aware that improving examination results will allow a greater proportion of pupils to move into higher-level further education courses.
- A few pupils attend alternative provision off the school's site. Leaders ensure that safeguarding procedures are just as rigorous in these institutions as the school's own procedures are. School staff keep in regular contact with the providers and check regularly, both on pupils' welfare and academic progress. Pupils attending alternative

provision make good progress.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils have responded positively to leaders' increasingly high expectations. Leaders have prioritised the development of pupils' behaviour, and pupils are grateful for the improvements that have been made. Over time, behaviour has improved notably. One pupil who joined the school last year remarked, 'Behaviour here is good because we are all known to staff.'
- During the inspection, pupils' behaviour in most of the lessons visited was positive and focused. In the very few lessons where low-level misbehaviour was evident, teachers managed this effectively using the school's systems.
- Pupils are sensible, mature and courteous outside of lessons and when moving around the site. Pupils are now proud of their school. They wear their uniform smartly, and interact with adults and their peers in a friendly and engaging manner.
- The rate of pupil exclusion is reducing, following a sharp increase when leaders heightened their expectations of pupils' conduct. An internal exclusion room is available but is not used as much now as in the past. There are now very few incidents of serious misbehaviour in school.
- Pupils' attendance has improved since the previous inspection and is in line with the national average. Leaders recognise that too many disadvantaged pupils are regularly absent from school. Furthermore, they are acutely aware that this has had a negative impact on the progress made by these pupils in the past.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils currently in the school are making good progress. This is because teaching and assessment are allowing pupils to develop secure knowledge, understanding and skills in the subjects they study. Where, before, girls' performance lagged behind that of boys, this is now not evident in many classes or year groups.
- Progress made by pupils seen in mathematics, English, modern foreign languages, product design, drama and art is above expectations. This is because of strong leadership, improved teaching and careful assessment, which is used to inform lesson planning. Progress has also improved in science.
- The Year 7 catch-up funding has helped pupils with low literacy skills to improve their reading and writing. This has helped pupils to make accelerated progress across Years 7 and 8. The progress pupils make across Years 7 and 8 in mathematics is now ensuring that they have both the appropriate knowledge and understanding and are able to apply their skills to the new GCSE.
- In English, pupils have made increasingly better progress in the last year across Years 7 to 10. For example, lower-ability pupils in Year 9 were observed giving good evidence for a character study from 'Of Mice and Men', using close references to the text. Overall in English, improvements have been underpinned by higher expectations,

improved teaching and sharper assessment practices.

- The recently published unconfirmed outcomes in 2017 GCSEs suggested that pupils did not achieve as well as they should have by the end of key stage 4. The proportion of pupils who made good progress over their time at the school was well below the national average. On closer scrutiny, inspectors found that several pupils did not have any initial information from key stage 2. The school's own baseline data on those pupils showed that they made good progress. Taking that into account, overall progress figures improved slightly from 2016.
- The school's own assessment information indicates that, in this academic year, a larger majority of pupils are on track to make better progress by the end of key stage 4. Inspection evidence shows that this is also the case for pupils currently in key stage 3.
- Most pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are making good progress from their individual starting points. This is because the support provided meets their needs, ensuring that they can overcome emotional or behavioural difficulties that act as barriers to their learning.
- In previous years, disadvantaged pupils have not made the progress that they should have, particularly in English. In 2017, unconfirmed outcomes in the GCSE showed that the differences in progress for disadvantaged pupils and other pupils had increased. However, disadvantaged pupils currently at the school, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, are now making more rapid progress across a range of subjects. This is due to the targeted support that these pupils receive and teachers' clear focus on their progress.
- Historically, the most able pupils have not made the progress that they should have, and so have not achieved as well as similar pupils nationally. Leaders are now ensuring that, in most classes, teachers provide greater levels of challenge to these pupils to push them towards the highest standards. This has increased the progress for this group although, occasionally, some teachers still do not expect enough of these pupils.
- From observations and checking pupils' work, inspectors agree that progress is more rapid than in the past for most pupils in a range of subjects. School leaders recognise where progress needs to accelerate further and have firm plans in place to address this.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- The leadership of the sixth form is effective. Leaders have a clear vision for the development of the sixth form, which they communicate clearly. Leaders are caring, passionate and know students well. There is an uncompromising drive to provide as many experiences as possible for students to raise aspirations, broaden horizons and meet their individual needs. Leaders have recently re-evaluated the offer for 16 to 19 and increased entry demands for the various pathways available. Retention rates from Year 12 to Year 13 are high.
- The small sixth form offers a range of academic and vocational courses. The number of students on roll in the sixth form remains below average but relatively stable. However, the school is taking a leading role in the consortium provision for the area.
- The range of students' abilities is quite varied on entry. Results in 2017 at A level

showed that progress was better than in previous years, although still a little below average. Boys make slightly better progress than girls. The number of disadvantaged students who join the sixth form make similar progress to their peers.

- Attainment at the higher levels of grades A* to B remained at 33%, lower than national averages. Learners without good passes in GCSE mathematics or English usually gain success, even though lower attainers tend not to improve by more than one grade. The few students who follow vocational courses achieve well.
- Teaching in the sixth form is now good. Teachers' strong subject knowledge, high expectations and careful planning extend and deepen students' learning. Students are completing work more consistently than before and making accelerated progress.
- Impartial careers advice enables students to take effective next steps into education or training. In 2017, nine out of 10 students secured their first choice for university, four joined foundation courses and 14 took up advanced apprenticeships.
- Attendance procedures have been tightened, with the result that attendance at lessons in the sixth form is now in line with the national average.
- Students display positive attitudes to learning and are proud to be members of the sixth form. They have welcomed the move to mixed-age tutor grouping, where they welcome and thrive on responsibility. All students spoken to during the inspection are aware of their responsibilities to be good role models for younger pupils and often help them with reading and academic support.
- Students are safe and told the inspectors that they feel safe. Students behave well, and their relationships with their teachers and their peers are positive. Their attendance has improved over the recent past and is now good. The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The sixth form meets the requirements for 16 to 19 study programmes, including appropriate opportunities for students to gain work experience and participate in enrichment activities.

School details

Unique reference number	138342
Local authority	Windsor and Maidenhead
Inspection number	10032890

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

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	562
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Jan McLucas
Headteacher	Neil Dimbleby
Telephone number	01628 622 236
Website	www.altwoodschool.co.uk
Email address	altwood@altwoodschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	31 May–1 June 2015

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school complies with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish.
- The school is smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils supported through the pupil premium is below average.
- The proportion of pupils who receive support for special educational needs and/or disabilities is well above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan is well above the national average.
- About one third of the pupils are from a minority ethnic background, which is above

the average for other schools.

- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for attainment and progress in English and mathematics by the end of Year 11.
- The school uses three alternative providers for a total of nine pupils. The providers are Harmony, The Link and Haybrook College.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in 31 lessons across a range of year groups and subjects. Several of these lessons were jointly observed with senior leaders.
- Inspectors held meetings with senior leaders, other staff, pupils and governors. Inspectors took account of the 46 responses to the confidential questionnaires received from staff.
- Telephone conversations were held with the school's improvement partner (a headteacher from a high-performing school) and a representative from the local diocesan board. An inspector met with seven parents from the school's parent group.
- Inspectors evaluated key documents, including the school's strategic planning documents, minutes of meetings, reports of attendance and behaviour, parent surveys and records relating to pupils' safety and academic progress.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour at break and lunchtimes, around the school and in an assembly, tutor periods and lessons.
- Inspectors spoke with pupils informally and formally.
- Inspectors considered 65 responses from parents on Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents, as well as the 64 comments made by parents using the free-text facility on Parent View.

Inspection team

Hugh Betterton, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Ian Tustian	Ofsted Inspector
Nicholas Simmonds	Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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