



# Altwood CofE Secondary School

Inspection Report

**Unique Reference Number** 110080  
**LEA** Windsor and Maidenhead LEA  
**Inspection number** 278364  
**Inspection dates** 22 February 2006 to 23 February 2006  
**Reporting inspector** Emma Ing HMI

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Comprehensive	<b>School address</b>	Altwood Road
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary controlled		Maidenhead
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11 to 18		SL6 4PU
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed	<b>Telephone number</b>	01628 622236
<b>Number on roll</b>	701	<b>Fax number</b>	01628 675410
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body	<b>Chair of governors</b>	Mr Fred Ashmore
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	18 October 1999	<b>Headteacher</b>	Miss Kathleen Higgins

<b>Age group</b> 11 to 18	<b>Inspection dates</b> 22 February 2006 - 23 February 2006	<b>Inspection number</b> 278364
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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by Emma Ing HMI, Russell Jordan HMI and two Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

Altwood Church of England Secondary School is a slightly smaller than average mixed comprehensive. The sixth form is very small. The attainment of students on entry is broadly average. About one quarter of students come from a variety of different minority ethnic backgrounds predominantly Asian. Just over one in ten students speaks English as an additional language. A higher proportion of students than average has a statement of educational need although the number with learning difficulties and disabilities is around average. Attendance is slightly below the national average.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## **Overall effectiveness of the school**

### **Grade: 2**

Altwood is a good school with some very strong features. It is on track to become an outstanding school in a few years time. It offers good value for money. The school knows itself well and through careful consultation with parents, students and other partners has a clear idea of what it is doing well and what it needs to do to improve. The current focus on raising student attainment has had demonstrable results. Progress is now good throughout the school and standards are steadily rising. The leadership of the headteacher is outstanding and she is well supported by a strong senior management team. Together, they lead a staff who are united around a shared vision and strong sense of purpose. Senior leaders are aware of the need to devolve leadership further and extend the skills and capabilities of some middle leaders. Students make good progress in the main school and very good progress in the sixth form. They enjoy coming to school and feel safe. They are aware of the need to adopt healthy lifestyles and many take advantage of the opportunities, sporting, academic and cultural to do this. The curriculum offered by the school matches the needs of students extremely well. The quality of teaching is good but, as the school recognises, not all aspects of good practice are fully embedded yet: this includes focused assessment which identifies the next steps the learner needs to take and the sophisticated use of data to inform teaching. The care of students is a strength of the school, and in particular the raising attainment team has demonstrated how their use of data to monitor student progress and inform intervention and support has significantly helped individuals reach challenging targets. The school had suffered a dip in performance subsequent to the last inspection, this however has now been reversed, and the significant improvements achieved in the last three years indicate that there is very good capacity for further improvement.

## **Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form**

### **Grade: 2**

Inspectors confirm the school's view that the effectiveness and efficiency of its small sixth form is good. Leaders understand the strengths and areas for development in the sixth form and have the capacity to improve the provision still further. The sixth form provides good value for money. There is a flexible range of courses to meet the needs of the students and the vision of the school. A consortium with four other schools enables Altwood and the partner schools to offer a wider range of subjects, where group sizes would not otherwise be viable. These arrangements are well run. The school is working hard to ensure the continuing effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form by maintaining student numbers and raising standards of achievement. Standards are improving and are above average overall. Achievement at the higher grades at advanced level (A Level) General Certificate of Education (GCE) is well above the national benchmarks and is at the national average for A-E grades. The progress students make from their start points is very good overall. Students value highly the information they receive to assist them in making their subject choices for post-16 study and for subsequent further study and career routes. The quality of teaching is

good, and teachers provide good support and feedback to enable students to improve their work. Students develop well their skills as independent learners, and capacity for economic well-being is well developed through the life skills programme. There is a wide range of enrichment activities for students, who have a well-developed sense of community.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

\* enable all teachers to meet the high standards set by some in both assessment to support student learning, and the sophisticated use of data to match teaching to learners' needs\* ensure the high quality leadership seen at senior level and amongst some of the school's middle leaders is consistently featured throughout the school\* ensure the continuing effectiveness of the sixth form by increasing student numbers and continuing to raise standards of achievement.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 2**

Good progress is made by all students in Key Stages 3 and 4 in English and mathematics. Their progress in science is sound. Students with statements of special educational need achieve exceptionally well and no one group underachieves. Progress is better now for all students than it has been in the past and is improving. The school sets challenging targets based on statistical prediction and teacher assessment and makes considerable effort to ensure that students achieve these. Standards attained at Key Stage 3 are in line with national averages in English, mathematics and science. They have risen sharply at Key Stage 4 and are now nearing the national average. On the basis of work seen, inspectors confirm the school's view that this upward trend will be maintained. At Key Stage 4 standards reached are particularly good in modern foreign languages, English and Drama and are less good in Geography and RE. The percentage of students achieving five or more A\*-G GCSE grades, including English and mathematics, is above the national average.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 2**

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Students enjoy school and there is little they would wish to change about it. Behaviour in lessons and around the school is largely good and the school has worked hard and successfully to improve attendance. In lessons, students listen to each other with interest and respect. A positive feature of the school is the way that older students support younger ones. This is both formally through 'buddying' and coaching schemes and, younger students tell us, informally. Most students agreed that they would be happy to discuss a problem with an adult or an older student in the school. As a result, students feel safe at school; any incidents of bullying are dealt with promptly and sixth form students have made an "anti-bullying" video as part of their media production course which they are currently showing younger students. One student explained, "There's

no-one in this school who doesn't have a friend." Students are aware of the importance of a healthy lifestyle and the student council has helped to ensure that healthy food is available in the school canteen. This has proved popular. Students value their life skills lessons and understand that they are of real use to them in their lives. One student told us, "They help you to protect yourself." During the inspection, sixth form students presented their version of Cinderella to children from three local primary schools who thoroughly enjoyed the performance. Throughout the school, students readily engage in fundraising for charity as well as supporting the elderly in the community.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 2**

Taken overall, teaching and learning are good. However, there remains scope to increase still further the proportion of lessons that are good and outstanding. The leadership has a good understanding of the strengths and areas for development in this area. In the best lessons, teachers make good use of a range of stimulating activities to meet the different learning needs of their students. Students learn well when asked to apply their knowledge to complete tasks. In many good lessons they benefit from opportunities to work in groups sharing learning and discussing their responses to questions. A further strength lies in the way that many teachers take care to ensure that the most able students are provided with extension activities that develop their understanding further. Questioning is well used by teachers to challenge students and extend their understanding. In an advanced subsidiary level (AS) physics lesson students' understanding of spectra was significantly extended through carefully structured questions matched to individual learning needs. Most teachers set clear objectives and students know what progress they are making and what they need to do to improve. However, this high quality feedback to learners is not yet fully embedded across the school. Where teaching is less good, tasks lack challenge and pace is slow so that some students lose interest. Not all teachers use assessment data with sufficient focus to set stretching targets for achievement in lessons. The school monitors the completion of coursework rigorously and good support is given to students to prepare for examinations.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

#### **Grade: 1**

#### **Grade for sixth form: 2**

The curriculum for 11-16 year olds is outstanding, offering a range of academic and vocational courses as well as short work placements for all, supplemented by college courses for a very few students. The school is applying for specialist school status in business and enterprise and already offers some innovative qualifications in this area. Much is done to ensure that students have good economic awareness and are well

prepared for working life. Business teachers have led the process of developing the curriculum in economic and business understanding and have successfully managed the delivery of this in other subject areas. Students' opportunities to study vocational and academic information and communication technology (ICT) courses for GCSE and other awards have been extended since the last inspection. These have proved both very popular and successful. ICT is also delivered well through other curriculum subjects. In an English lesson Year 9 students were devising an electronic presentation of Macbeth's soliloquy, many choosing to do so in cartoon form. There are good links with local businesses, feeder primary schools and other agencies to extend the learning of all. Special attention is paid to ensure that talented and gifted students are suitably challenged through university visits and projects. In one such project, the Greenpower Challenge, a group of mixed aged students worked together to design, make and race an electric car. The curriculum is enhanced to an exceptional degree. There are a variety of sporting activities on offer in the evenings, during school holidays and at weekends. Students value the experiences of water sports and mountain activities that they have gained through school. Opportunities for participation in the performing arts are also very good, with thriving bands and choirs. Students also benefit from participation in mock trials, mock parliaments and have performed well in local competitions in such areas.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 1**

#### **Grade for sixth form: 2**

The care, guidance and support offered by the school are exemplary. Students are ably supported by a small but excellent team of learning advisers who work as part of the school's raising attainment team. They offer one-to-one and small group support which is highly valued by students and parents alike. Students are encouraged to consider options available to them in higher education through a mentored 'Aim Higher' programme. Year 10 and 11 students are grouped together for tutor time which enables them to benefit from each other's experience. The very popular Lakeside trip to experience outdoor adventures in Year 11 provides them with an excellent opportunity to face new challenges in a supportive environment. Child protection measures are secure and risk assessment is in place. Support for students with learning difficulties and disabilities is outstanding. Students work with their teachers to agree targets which are evaluated by the coordinator of special educational needs. These students make very good progress, as do those receiving specialist support in the Speech and Language Resource. As one parent wrote to the school earlier this year, 'There is a wonderful balance at Altwood between pastoral care and education.'

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

The extremely able leadership of the headteacher has led to demonstrable improvements in the last three years in terms of higher student attainment and better

progress, a broad and relevant curriculum offer, better ICT provision and significant steps towards a sound financial footing. The school has proven its very good capacity to improve. The headteacher is very well supported by an efficient and clear thinking senior leadership team. The school evaluates its own work extremely well and uses a number of methods to ensure that the views of students, their parents and other partners, such as feeder primary schools, are taken into account when reviewing performance. As a consequence, leaders at all levels have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of their area of responsibility. The school development plan is robust and focused on clearly prioritised areas for improvement. The first of these priorities continues to be the raising of student attainment and this drives the work of leaders of the school at all levels. A number of middle leaders are very effective at identifying areas for improvement, implementing strategies to meet these needs and monitoring their effectiveness. Some are less confident and less effective at this but are supported through an effective line management process and all have robust plans for improvement. Governors are mindful of their accountability and are effective at holding the leaders of the school to account. They are extremely supportive of the school but are also able to challenge appropriately. Working closely with the headteacher they have managed to reduce significantly a budget deficit whilst improving the quality of provision.



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## Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	<b>School Overall</b>	<b>16-19</b>
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### Overall effectiveness

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	2	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	Yes
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

### Achievement and standards

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	2	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	3	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1	

### Personal development and well-being

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	3	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	

### The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?</b>	2	2
<b>How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?</b>	1	2
<b>How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?</b>	1	2

<sup>1</sup> Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

**Leadership and management**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	1	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	Yes

<b>The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy</b>	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
<b>The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe</b>	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
<b>The extent to which learners make a positive contribution</b>	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
<b>The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being</b>	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

## **Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

I am writing to share with you the main judgements that we made when we came to inspect your school in February. Many of you spoke to us and told us about what you are learning and about the school in general. Some of you made very impressive short presentations to us. We want to thank you for welcoming us so well and for sharing with us your views and experiences so openly.

Your school is a good school and is on track to become a very good school. Your headteacher, Miss Higgins, is extremely able and is committed to ensuring that you achieve as well as you can. She, with her strong leadership team, staff and governors, has worked hard to make sure that you are well supported in your learning, that you can all do courses that are interesting and relevant to you and that a rich variety of extra curricular activities are on offer. We would urge you to take advantage of these opportunities if you are not already doing so. We were particularly impressed by the support given to those of you who have difficulties with learning and also those of you who are talented and gifted. We saw that the raising attainment team makes a difference to the achievements that many of you make. We were also pleased to note that as a student body you help and support each other. One of you told us that andquot;There's no-one in this school who doesn't have a friend,andquot; and you all felt that there was somebody in the school to turn to if need be.

There are some things that will make the school even better. The leadership team is already aware of these and working on them, but we have asked them to\* continue to develop the sixth form and increase student numbers there\* make sure that all your teachers match the standards set by the best\* make sure that the high quality leadership evident at senior levels and amongst some middle managers is consistent across the school. We enjoyed the time we spent at your school as you do and thank you, once again for your warm welcome. We look forward to following the progress of the school.