



# Dame Alice Owen's School

## Inspection Report

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**Unique Reference Number** 117579  
**LEA** HERTFORDSHIRE LEA  
**Inspection number** 285623  
**Inspection dates** 21 June 2006 to 21 June 2006  
**Reporting inspector** Mr. David Jones HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools the authority to inspect any school in England. The inspection is to be treated as a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

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<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary	<b>School address</b>	Dugdale Hill Lane
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided		EN6 2DU
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11 to 18		
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed	<b>Telephone number</b>	01707643441
<b>Number on roll</b>	1414	<b>Fax number</b>	01707645011
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body	<b>Chair of governors</b>	Mr. Tom Morkill
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	4 March 2002	<b>Headteacher</b>	Dr. A. J. Davison

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one Additional Inspector. In the course of the day visit, inspectors met with a range of staff and students and observed the school at work. Paired observations of several lessons were conducted with senior managers. Meetings were held with senior staff and governors prior to and immediately after the inspection day. The school's excellent preparatory papers included a clear, analytical self-evaluation document and a well-considered school improvement plan and these provided critical evidence in shaping the inspectors' judgements. Discussions with governors and the receipt of 237 questionnaires from parents further assisted the writing of this report. HMI conducted a range of student interviews and the very positive opinions they offered matched those expressed by the parents.

## Description of the school

Dame Alice Owen's is a partially selective voluntary aided mixed school. The school is financially supported by the Dame Alice Owen Foundation. The trustees are the Worshipful Company of Brewers of the City of London. Many students come from outside the local area and their socio-economic background compares favourably with the national picture. Attainment on entry represents a wide range of abilities. The school is heavily over-subscribed, and very few students leave or join other than at normal times. In each year group 30% of the places are offered for academic ability, 5% for musical aptitude and 10% are reserved for students who live in Islington where the Dame Alice Owen's selective schools were founded in 1613 and 1886. The school is larger than average with 416 students in the sixth form; 75% of all students are of White British origin and the remainder represent a diverse range of ethnic minority groups. The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is very low. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and disabilities, including those with a statement of special educational needs, is below average. The school has been a specialist language college since 1996.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school. The students' attainment on entry is above average; they make outstanding progress and achieve results at age 14 and 16 that compare favourably with those of the most successful schools nationally. A measure of this success is that 92% of students achieve five higher grade GCSE results and 55% attain the highest A or A\* grades; this latter figure is three times the national average. The school sets demanding targets and provides outstanding academic support and guidance to students of all abilities. High standards of attainment and student progress are a consistent feature in: modern foreign languages, science, mathematics, religious education, history, information and communication technology, and music. A similar picture emerges in the sixth form where modern foreign languages, chemistry, business studies, and music are amongst the most successful departments. Standards in the sixth form are outstanding and have been for some time. Almost all students continue their studies at university and 22 students obtained a place at either Oxford or Cambridge University in 2005. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities make very good progress because of the outstanding care, guidance and support provided by teachers and support staff. Overall, curricular opportunities are good with a number of outstanding features. As a specialist language school students are provided with the opportunity to study ten languages, including Japanese, Chinese and Latin. The school funds teaching and support staff who work in linked primary schools and other local secondary schools, and provides 'Language in the Community' courses at a local college. The provision and leadership of the languages department is outstanding. An accelerated learning programme encourages many students to take GCSE examinations early and thereby extend their range of qualifications. Separate sciences are taught from Year 9 with considerable success; this allows an increasing number of students to study medicine at university. An extensive range of advanced level courses is provided with many students taking the opportunity to study an additional language during the lunch hour or after school. At 14-19 there is a developing relationship between the local secondary schools, which ensures access to a variety of vocational courses. However, approximately half the students in years 10 and 13 do not have sufficient time to study the provisions of the agreed religious education syllabus. The range of academic courses available in the sixth form is very good. The range of extra-curricular opportunities is outstanding; many departments organise overseas study visits to relevant and often exotic destinations. An excellent range of opportunities are provided to study music; the strength of this provision was confirmed when two students from the school reached the final stages of the 2005 'Young Musician of the Year' competition. Inspectors reviewed the school's robust and well established procedures for the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning. The school believes that the quality of teaching and learning is outstanding and HMI agree; the impact of this on student progress over time is clearly evident in the results. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge, very good questioning skills and increasingly employ information and communication technology effectively to support learning. Pace and challenge are used effectively to motivate pupils. Work is very well matched to the pupils' needs because teachers build consistently on the students'

prior knowledge. The students' attitude to learning is excellent. Those interviewed commented on how fortunate they were to have secured a place in the school and noted their rate of progress had exceeded that of friends they knew from primary schools. Parental questionnaires are similarly positive; the overwhelming majority praise the quality of teaching and the excellent care, guidance and support. The school makes very good use of assessment information; the well managed trial of a new marking system gives a clear indication of the school's capacity to improve. The performance of all students is carefully evaluated and support provided to meet individual need. The students' personal development is outstanding; they become mature, articulate individuals some of whom, when asked, went so far as to say 'It's perfect, I would not change a thing and would love to do it all over again.' Behaviour throughout the school is excellent; students are polite, confident and move around the complex network of buildings with purpose and a positive demeanour. Many sixth form students give their time as learning mentors and councillors in the lower school, and assist with educational visits and contribute as prefects. The students enjoy their education and attendance is well above average. The students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are outstanding. Students said that they could ask any member of staff for support and knew that help was always available. Child protection procedures are robust, and well understood by staff. Students comment that the opportunities to eat a balanced diet have improved. Leadership and management are outstanding; the headteacher's vision has enhanced the monitoring and evaluation of provision. The senior leaders of the school have a very accurate view of the school's performance; they display a perceptive focus on the maintenance and improvement of the students' achievement and personal development. Regular monitoring of teaching and learning by the senior management team ensures that best practice is shared. Specialist status in languages has provided outstanding curriculum opportunities for the students and the wider community, as well as excellent results. The school has been invited by the Department for Education and Skills to seek specialist status in a second major curriculum area. Governors and senior staff are consulting parents and students on subject areas which could form the basis of this work. Governance is good with a number of outstanding features, which includes a well balanced strategic vision for the school and the appropriate determination to maintain the very high levels of pupils' achievement. However, currently the governing body does not provide sufficient time for the locally agreed syllabus for religious education. The very high standards found at the time of the last inspection have been maintained. Significant improvements have been made to the use of assessment, and the monitoring and evaluation of teaching. The school demonstrates very good capacity to continue to improve.

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

### **Grade: 1**

This is outstanding.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 1**

This is outstanding.

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

### **Grade: 1**

This is outstanding.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 1**

This is outstanding.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

#### **Grade: 2**

#### **Grade for sixth form: 1**

This is good.

### **Care, guidance and support**

#### **Grade: 1**

This is outstanding.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 1**

This is outstanding.

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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>	1	1
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
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>	1	1
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	1	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	1
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>	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The behaviour of learners	1	
The attendance of learners	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
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	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	

### The quality of provision

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

<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>	1	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
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	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
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	insufficient evidence

<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**

Thank you for contributing to the recent inspection of your school. It was very good to meet some of you to hear how much you enjoy the opportunities provided by the school. I was particularly impressed by your attitudes to learning and the attention you give to the tasks your teachers provide. You respond to questions very well, giving your ideas in an articulate and thoughtful manner. Behaviour around the school is excellent and it was a pleasure to hear you speak of the outstanding care, support and guidance you value so highly. In lessons, your grasp of the subject and ability to discuss key questions is impressive. The skills I saw deployed in biology, geography, history and English were remarkable. Many of your parents took the time to offer their extremely positive views on the education you receive, so please give them my thanks. There are many outstanding aspects in the daily life of the school, and the new courses and initiatives developing from the school's specialist languages status will continue to influence the enhancement of the curriculum. I know the headteacher and the governors have sought your views on the development of a second subject specialism and I am very confident you will develop the debate. I look forward to hearing about your future successes.