



Alfriston School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 110573
Local Authority Buckinghamshire
Inspection number 288709
Inspection dates 10–11 October 2006
Reporting inspector Anne Berger HMI

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

Type of school	Special	School address	Penn Road
School category	Non-maintained special		Knotty Green
Age range of pupils	11–18		Beaconsfield HP9 2TS
Gender of pupils	Girls	Telephone number	01494 673740
Number on roll (school)	117	Fax number	01494 670177
Number on roll (6th form)	8		
Appropriate authority	The local authority	Headteacher	Mrs J Male
Date of previous school inspection	7 October 2002		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–18	10–11 October 2006	288709

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors of schools and an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Alfriston School is located in an advantaged area of Buckinghamshire but admits pupils from across the whole county with a wide range of backgrounds. Compared to other similar schools there are few pupils receiving free school meals. The pupils all reach standards below national expectations in nearly all subjects and have moderate learning difficulties and associated disabilities. A few come to Alfriston because they have been unhappy or unsuccessful in mainstream schools. The school has a residential provision for up to 20 pupils which is open for 3 nights each week. The sixth form is available for those who would benefit from a more sheltered setting than is available in local colleges.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Alfriston School is a warm and caring community and the parents hold the school in high regard. Suitable emphasis is placed on the acquisition of life and social skills and the pupils' personal development is good. Those who board also learn many skills which prepare them well for independent living. The pupils' health and safety is given high regard and the day-to-day running of the school is effective.

Many parents responded to the inspection questionnaire and told us that their children were happy at the school. The younger pupils agreed, although a few of the older pupils were more reticent. They said they would like to be treated in a more mature manner and the inspection team agreed. Though the quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall, lessons take too little account of the ages of the pupils. The older pupils are treated like much younger children in some lessons. They are not given sufficient opportunities to develop independent learning skills through team and collaborative work.

The views of pupils are sought regularly and effectively to inform improvements and there are good opportunities for pupils to make a positive contribution to the school community.

The school's view of its own performance was over-optimistic and insufficiently well-grounded in a rigorous evaluation of the progress the pupils make in different subjects. Last year, the programme of lesson observations had lapsed and too little was done to develop a whole school system for tracking and evaluating the progress the pupils make. There are assessment systems within individual subjects which record the pupils' achievements but they are not drawn together to enable staff to be accountable for the performance of the pupils.

Though the pupils' achievements are generally satisfactory they do not do as well as they could. The progress pupils make varies considerably between subjects. In science, art and mathematics suitable GCSE courses have been introduced and last year results were good. Other subjects have been slow to follow suit and pupils are entered for other awards which do not provide sufficient challenge.

The leadership and management is satisfactory overall. The new headteacher, who started at the school in September 2006, is successfully beginning to address the school's weaknesses. She has won the confidence of staff and has made some immediate and urgent changes in the ethos of the school. The other members of the senior leadership team are keen to improve the outcomes for pupils and the capacity to make the changes necessary is good. Staff have been set suitably challenging targets and regular classroom observation is due to recommence.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Most students in the sixth form make good progress and some do better than this. The quality of teaching is good and the curriculum is well matched to the needs of

learners. The good careers guidance work ensures that at age 16 the appropriate provision is identified for students either within school or in other schools, colleges or training providers.

Effectiveness and efficiency of boarding provision

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The boarding provision caters well for its students. Recent inspection reports have no key issues for the school to address. Staff are very adept in addressing the needs of students through a wide range of activities both within and outside school. However, the impact of the provision on the pupils is not sufficiently well evaluated by the school.

What the school should do to improve further

- Inject greater ambition for these pupils through setting challenging targets and establishing robust systems to evaluate the work of the school to ensure the targets are met.
- Build on the pockets of very good practice to establish coherent systems for assessing and tracking pupils' progress
- Develop teaching expertise so that more suitable activities are planned which fully meet the pupils' individual needs and their growing maturity.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

The progress the pupils make varies between groups of pupils. The lower attaining pupils make the greatest progress because lessons are planned more effectively to meet their needs. The more able pupils, some of whom reach standards appropriate for their ages in certain subjects, are not stretched or challenged sufficiently.

The best progress is made in subjects where assessment is used effectively, where pupils are involved in the evaluation of their performance and where challenging targets are set which are accessible. Unfortunately this practice is inconsistent and the assessments that have been made are often unreliable as they have not been subject to internal or external checking.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The pupils' behaviour is good, though in lessons they are too often passive receivers rather than actively engaged in thinking and learning. There is a good programme of

personal development which pervades all aspects of their school life. The school encourages students to adopt a healthy lifestyle in a number of effective ways, for example, through the outstanding opportunities to improve their physical fitness and engage in sports.

In the few instances of bullying, students are clear about what they should do and the school takes prompt action. One parent commented, 'Staff at school noticed and had taken action by the time I called.'

Attendance is very good. Even pupils with considerable medical needs try to come to school when ever they can. The school employs nursing support to ensure any barriers to full participation are removed. A visiting speech and language therapist is of great benefit to the pupils. She works very effectively with a specialist teaching assistant who ensures the teaching strategies are used across the curriculum.

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are all good and the school has taken appropriate steps to ensure that it meets its commitments to developing students' citizenship skills and understanding of other religions.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

The quality of teaching is mainly satisfactory although it varies from lesson to lesson. For example, teaching in physical education was outstanding but in technology it was inadequate. The variability is caused in part by weaknesses in management. There is a lack of monitoring across the school to ensure that the best practice is shared.

In English and personal, social and health education there is an over emphasis on worksheets with little variation in teaching and learning styles. In these lessons the pupils did not have enough opportunities to learn from each other. This contrasts with work in art, maths and science where the pupils were more actively engaged in their learning and were expected to think for themselves.

In most lessons the work is too easy for the most able pupils. The views of some Year 7 pupils support this view. For example, one pupil told us, 'The work here is much easier than in my last school'.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

There are a wide range of accredited courses offered and the curriculum is led and delivered by specialists who have a good knowledge of their subjects. There is insufficient challenge for the more able pupils and sometimes the units of work are not relevant for the age of the pupils.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Very good care is provided for students based on good relationships between pupils and staff. Arrangements for safeguarding pupils are robust and reviewed on a regular basis. The health and safety of students is promoted very well. Teaching and support staff are committed to ensuring high levels of care for pupils at all times, for example during breaks, at lunchtime and within the residential provision. At these times they are vigilant and conscientiously implement the school's procedures.

Academic guidance is sound and there is good careers provision. However, the school's assessment procedures are not sufficiently rigorous to clearly identify the progress students make and so guide parents in shaping the future for their child. Careers guidance is good.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The governors expressed the issues facing the school succinctly and accurately.

'The school did not do itself justice by not having a thorough evaluation of its performance'

but,

'The new headteacher has brought a breath of fresh air into the school.'

She has won the confidence of staff and pupils and the leadership team is beginning to take on their new responsibilities effectively. Governors have been aware that certain important issues have been left for too long and they have set challenging targets for the new headteacher to ensure the weaknesses referred to in this report are addressed. The capacity of the school to improve is good.

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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>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3	2
The effectiveness and efficiency of boarding provision	2	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	4	4
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No	No

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	3	
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	3	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3	
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, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you for welcoming us when we came to inspect your school. We enjoyed talking to you and we were impressed by how much everyone cared for each other and how hard you tried in lessons. We saw good work in many of your files. While we were watching lessons, you did what you were asked to do and behaved very well.

A number of you said that some of the lessons were too easy and we agree that in some subjects you could learn more if you were given harder work with more chances to work in groups. The older pupils we spoke to said you would like to be treated more like adults in lessons. We have asked your teachers to think about that.

Mrs Male has made a good start as your new headteacher and staff are keen to help you do better in your lessons.

Yours faithfully

Ann Berger HMI

Lead Inspector