

The King Alfred School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123879
Local Authority	Somerset
Inspection number	292826
Inspection dates	18–19 September 2007
Reporting inspector	Brenda Cusdin HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1381
6th form	123
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Tony Grimes
Headteacher	Keith Diffey
Date of previous school inspection	25 February 2002
School address	Burnham Road Highbridge TA9 3EE
Telephone number	01278 784881
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Age group	11-18
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

The King Alfred School is larger than most and has a growing sixth form. The students' social and economic circumstances cover a wide span, including more disadvantaged communities. There are very few students from minority ethnic backgrounds and very few students learn English as an additional language. The number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. Students joining in Year 7 have average standards. The school has experienced severe recruitment difficulties and there has been a high turnover of staff in recent years. The King Alfred School became a specialist sports college in 2003.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The King Alfred School's overall effectiveness is satisfactory, with some good features.

The considerable challenges in recruiting staff have had an impact on achievement and teaching. Senior managers have spent considerable energy ensuring that there are enough teachers and that the quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory.

The school's clear guidance about what teachers should do in lessons, last year's support from local authority consultants and useful in-house coaching have all improved the quality of teaching and learning. However, there is not yet enough good teaching that consistently challenges students to ensure that they make good progress in all subjects. Standards at Year 9, Year 11 and Year 13 are average and students' achievement at these ages is broadly satisfactory.

Despite the challenges, the school has some good features. For example, the sports college initiative is successfully promoting healthy lifestyles and widespread links between the school and the community. The curriculum is now good because extra-curricular opportunities are excellent, there is more choice in courses offered to students and those who want to get ahead can take examinations earlier.

Students make an effective contribution to school life and their personal development and well-being are good. Some parents are concerned about disruption in lessons and bullying. The school has tightened its management of behaviour, reviewed its policy for dealing with bullying and publicised it widely. Disruptions have reduced substantially and behaviour is now satisfactory.

In many ways, the school cares for and supports its students well. Twice a year, staff provide useful information to students and their parents about the standards they are achieving and the targets they should be achieving. However, students in Years 7 to 11 do not get regular enough feedback on how they can make better progress.

Leadership and management are satisfactory, with good features. The headteacher provides good leadership and the relatively new senior team has strengthened management skills at this tier. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory. Senior leaders and governors have not ducked weaknesses, such as in the teaching of information and communication technology (ICT). They have taken a bold decision to push on with initiatives in the curriculum. The school conducts consultations with parents and students about major changes but some parents report difficulties in communications with the school.

Improvement planning to date has concentrated mainly on the changes necessary within each subject department and their development needs vary considerably. Rightly, senior leaders recognise that future plans should draw together whole-school issues more clearly and communicate what needs to be done to all staff teams, including, for example, tutor teams. Capacity to improve is satisfactory

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The sixth form provides a satisfactory education. Students choose the school because it is friendly, comfortable and familiar. They enjoy learning and make a positive contribution to the school and wider community. The standards that students reach are broadly average and their achievement is satisfactory.

The school guides the students well in their choices. The sixth form curriculum offers a good range of opportunities in a safe and caring environment. The school sets targets for students that are adequately challenging and is beginning to involve students in ongoing assessment that shows clearly how well they are doing and how to improve.

The leadership and management of the sixth form are satisfactory. The capacity to improve is sound. The school has identified appropriate improvements that each subject department should make but has not expressed these clearly through an overall sixth form development plan. Teaching and learning are satisfactory but not good enough to ensure all students make good progress.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the amount of good teaching and learning by ensuring that students of all abilities are consistently challenged in lessons.
- Raise achievement, especially in Years 7 to 11, by ensuring that assessment is used regularly and consistently to show students how to improve their work.
- Improve the effectiveness of improvement planning by establishing key whole-school issues with measurable outcomes and involving all staff teams.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Results in national tests and examinations in Year 9, Year 11 and Year 13 have been broadly average in the last few years and students have made reasonable progress given their starting points. The progress of different minority groups and that of students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is satisfactory.

In 2006, Year 9 students did not achieve the targets set for their year group, with the exception of mathematics. The provisional 2007 results show that performance fell short of the targets set for English, mathematics and science.

In 2006 and 2007, students' performance in Year 11 reached the targets set for overall passes at GCSE despite the staffing difficulties. Provisional results for Year 11 students in 2007 show a substantial increase in the numbers achieving higher-grade GCSE passes compared with recent years, including in English and mathematics, although the target for five or more A* to C GCSE passes was not achieved.

Many more students are opting for physical education (PE) GCSE courses as a result of the sports college initiative. Sixty students entered for a GCSE in PE in 2005 whereas 130 entered in 2007. GCSE results in PE dropped from 58% in 2005 to 40% in 2006 but recovered to 46% in 2007 when the sports college target was 52%.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Most students enjoy school. Attendance is in line with school and national targets. Changes in the curriculum and a very good range of extra-curricular activities have encouraged positive attitudes to school. Behaviour around the site is good. The school's work to improve the quality of teaching and learning has substantially reduced the amount of disruption in lessons.

Students have been successfully involved in important policy decisions. Many sixth form students act as mentors and tutors to younger students, for example, in sport, music and languages. Others undertake voluntary work locally or work with children in feeder schools

The social and cultural development of students is good. Various international links ensure that students are prepared for life in a multi-faith and multi-ethnic society. The sports college status has increased students' participation in sports and with a sustained emphasis on healthy eating has done much to promote a healthy lifestyle. Students understand the importance of safe practices.

The school prepares students well for their future economic well-being through careers and enterprise modules in lessons, work experience and links with the local business community. However, all students do not develop their ICT skills as fully as they should and standards in English and mathematics remain broadly average.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Improving the quality of teaching has been a major focus within subject departments. Teachers work to clear guidance about how they should structure their lessons, vary learning activities and include some independent or group work. Last year saw a significant reduction in lessons inadequately taught and an increase in lessons where teaching is good compared with the previous year. Teachers are using the guidance about lessons to devise and implement useful lesson plans.

In the most effective teaching and learning, the pace is brisk throughout the session; the students are very clear what they should be learning, they have to do quite a bit of thinking or research to achieve this and are really thrilled when they succeed.

Currently, there is not enough good teaching and learning to ensure that students make good progress over time. Sensibly, the school plans to focus this year on improving learning and increasing challenge in the classrooms.

Learning support assistants make a valuable contribution when supporting individuals in classrooms, helping them to succeed with their tasks. They lead small groups effectively to reinforce particular skills.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

In the main school, a wider range of options has increased personal choice. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive good support so that they can access learning activities across subjects. The partnership with Bridgwater College extends the curriculum for some students. The school is determinedly remedying past weaknesses in the ICT curriculum with much better courses.

The curriculum has been developed to meet the recommendations of Every Child Matters. There is an excellent range of enrichment activities, particularly in sports, in which many students

participate. Students are very positive about the benefits of the sports college initiative. This has brought a wider choice of PE courses, forged links with universities, local clubs and pupils in feeder primary schools, and made rich opportunities to contribute to the life of the community.

The curriculum in the sixth form is well suited to the needs and the abilities of the students. Provision includes advanced level, vocational and key skills courses as well as extra-curricular and sporting opportunities. The sixth form curriculum meets the aspirations of the students attending and enables them to develop well, personally and socially.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Good safeguarding procedures are in place and these are reviewed regularly. Students confirm that they feel safe in the school.

The school has been working effectively to make behaviour management more consistent. Policies and sanctions are clear to students and respected by them. Students confirmed that they value good relationships with teachers.

The staff work hard to promote equality of opportunity and ensure that no group lags behind everyone else. There are excellent arrangements to support students joining the school in Year 7. Students' individual needs are identified well and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive effective support. Support for vulnerable students is good and the school works well with outside agencies.

A significant number of parents expressed concern about the effectiveness of the school's strategies for dealing with bullying. The school has a range of appropriate strategies, including a confidential website, and works well with other agencies for counselling and support.

Assessment to guide learning is not yet used skilfully by teachers in all subjects. The achievement of individual students is shared well with parents on review days but more frequent communication to students via marking, and guidance about how to improve their work, is not established well enough in Years 7 to 11. The school recognises that this should be better.

Regular monitoring of students' performance is the basis of good support and guidance in the sixth form, which usually leads students to further or higher education, including university, as well as apprenticeships or employment.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The headteacher provides good leadership, supported by the appointment of a senior leadership team who have strengths in strategic management and are firmly committed to doing their very best to make rapid improvements. Severe staffing difficulties have been tackled. Steps taken to ensure that the quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory were sensible and productive. Specialist status has led to much-improved facilities and very good links with the community and feeder primary schools but has had a limited impact on standards.

The school's self-evaluation is satisfactory. The senior team are aware of the major strengths in the school and urgent areas for improvement. However, the school's development plan has relatively few desired outcomes that are about school-wide improvements and that are measurable. Monitoring and evaluation by the senior leadership team is not occurring regularly enough to ensure that improvements achieved in subject focus weeks continue at the desired rate.

Strategies for analysing performance and spotting students underachieving are good, though not yet consistently applied across all subject areas. A consequence is that academic standards have improved in Year 11 but remain below some of the targets set for the school at Year 9 and Year 11. The quality of middle management practices varies from very good to satisfactory.

Financial management is good. Students and staff appreciate the improved accommodation. Governors are well informed, meet regularly and take an active interest in the school's development.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	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	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	3
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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	3	
The behaviour of learners	3	
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	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3	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.

Annex A

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	
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

20 September 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of The King Alfred School, Highbridge, Somerset TA9 3EE

Many thanks for your warm welcome. We really enjoyed our visit to your school. We learnt a lot from talking with you and the staff, and joining in your lessons and activities.

Your school is giving you a satisfactory education and there are some things which are good. We were impressed by the many ways that you contribute to school life and the local community. You told us how much you appreciate the sporting facilities and the new accommodation. You are developing good personal skills.

The new curriculum in Years 7 to 11 gives you more choice. You will be able to take examinations early if you want to get ahead. The numbers in the sixth form are growing and you are very happy with your choice of courses. You get good feedback in the sixth form about ways to improve your work. All of you are making satisfactory progress and standards are in line with national averages.

Your headteacher and senior team have tackled problems with staffing, and have taken steps to ensure that teaching is satisfactory overall. But the school would like to see more good teaching and learning to ensure that you make good progress in all subjects.

Your headteacher and staff are firmly committed to making your school even better.

We agreed that top priorities are to ensure that you make good progress in all subjects through teachers challenging you more consistently in lessons, and especially in Years 7 to 11 by guiding you more clearly on how to improve your work.

We also said that everyone should understand which improvements are the most important and how they can help to make them happen. We hope that includes you.

Very best wishes

Brenda Cusdin Her Majesty's Inspector



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