

# Alexandra Park School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	131758
<b>Local Authority</b>	Haringey
<b>Inspection number</b>	293839
<b>Inspection date</b>	3 May 2007
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Carmen Rodney HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Comprehensive
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	1170
6th form	205
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Ms S Gold
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs R Hudson
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	11 November 2002
<b>School address</b>	Bidwell Gardens London N11 2AZ
<b>Telephone number</b>	020 8826 4880
<b>Fax number</b>	020 8888 2236

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## Introduction

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

## Description of the school

Alexandra Park, a specialist science school, is much larger than most secondary schools. The school opened in 1999 and the large sixth form was established in 2004. The school is heavily over-subscribed with four applicants for every one of the 216 places.

The school draws its students from a wide geographical area that includes the relatively prosperous wards in the borough as well as some of the most deprived regions in the country: over 40% of the total intake comes from the latter area. The student population reflects the rich diverse cultural heritages of the borough. The percentage of students speaking a language other than English is well above average as is the proportion entitled to a free school meal and the proportion of students who have a learning difficulty or disability. The school is involved in the National College for School Leadership, provides extended service and holds the following awards: Investors in People, Sports mark and Healthy Schools.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

Alexandra Park is a good school with some outstanding features. Although the school is relatively new, its standing in the community and beyond is well established because of the outstanding leadership of the headteacher. The large, positive response to the parents' questionnaire confirmed that the majority support the school and see staff as 'dedicated and committed as they motivate their children to learn'. The partnership with parents and external organisations is excellent. Parents recognised that the school has an 'inclusive ethos...which contributes to a great sense of community, their children's happiness, safety and security.' This distinctive community spirit and social diversity were also highlighted by students who were interviewed by the inspectors.

The school has good capacity for further improvement. The school's specialist science status and its vision for the future development of centres of excellence for science and mathematics, have been forged through the exceptionally good leadership of the headteacher. The very well informed governors and senior team have built a strong foundation for the school's growth and future improvement.

A young, vibrant group of managers at all levels provide good support and clearly articulate the headteacher's vision for the next stage of the school's development, 'Success for All.' Senior managers are therefore developing, spreading and modifying good practice in relation to findings from reviews. The senior team has a good understanding of the school's work. They recognise that at this stage of the school's development, middle managers need to be more rigorous and consistent when monitoring and evaluating their work to improve performance further. The specialist science status has provided a considerable momentum for change, and is contributing to developing the curriculum, students' independent learning skills, and raising standards. This is appropriately reflected in the school improvement plan, which focuses sharply on improving the quality of teaching and accelerating students' progress further through specialist projects, transition work, re-designation and greater use of information and communication technology.

Students' academic attainment and progress have improved each year since the national tests and examinations were first taken in 2003 and 2004. Students enter the school with broadly average levels of attainment and reach average standards, which places the school in the top 20% nationally in terms of students' academic progress. Whilst progress is good for students, irrespective of their background, gender, ethnicity or ability, all make outstanding progress in English and those with a statement of special educational need make exceptionally good progress.

The school successfully helps students to achieve well as they move through the years because expectations are suitably high and the quality of teaching is good. The school recognises that the quality of teaching needs to be consistently good or better to accelerate students' progress further. The students' positive attitudes and good behaviour mean that the majority arrive at lessons wanting to learn. Teachers plan well structured lessons and students indicated that they enjoy discussions, the mutual respect and practical approach and fun activities their teachers use as these help them to learn well. There is however an awareness from staff, parents and students that a small minority of students present challenging behaviour. The school provides good support for the increasing number of students with emotional and behavioural

difficulties and students rightly acknowledge that the school acts swiftly to minimise the impact of disruptive behaviour on their learning.

The quality of care, guidance and support received by students is good with some outstanding features and permeates all aspects of school life. Many contributors, including external partners, support staff, teachers and parents working as coaches, work together to develop students' confidence and learning skills so, that they can strive within what one student described as a 'caring and good working environment.'

The curriculum is outstanding and responds well to individual needs. When combined with the wide selection of enrichment activities, the distinctive extended classes such as Mandarin and Latin, and the Saturday school, all make a significant contribution to pupils' personal development and well-being.

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

### **Grade: 2**

The quality of provision in the growing sixth form is good. Students generally achieve well in their chosen courses, but they do not achieve equally well in all subject areas. Students' performance is particularly successful in English, history, chemistry, GNVQ intermediate science, and on the vocational business course. However, their progress is slowest in biology and mathematics. Students' progress accelerates over the periods of study and many make up ground after Year 12 as they develop stronger independent study skills.

The sixth form is well led and managed. Most students move into the sixth form as a result of the school's efforts to fulfil its mission of 'putting learning first'. The majority of Year 13 continue on to higher education although a significant number drop out of courses, sometimes at the end of Year 12, for various reasons including lower than expected AS-level results. They share generously in the mainstream life of the school and provide helpful models of leadership for younger students. Students are particularly appreciative of the stimulating enrichment opportunities such as debating, and of the good careers guidance that supports them towards further education, training and work. However, they do not all have opportunities for studying religious education. Working relationships with adults are good and underpin the overall good teaching and learning within the sixth form.

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

- implement the plans to strengthen the specialist status in order to improve the quality of teaching and learning and raise standards even further
- spread the best practice to increase the capacity of all middle managers to lead and manage their area of work, thereby ensuring greater accountability and consistency.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 2**

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

The upward trend in students' academic achievement places the school in the top 20% of schools nationally in terms of students' progress. The students who enter the school make good progress and outstandingly good progress in English. Students with a statement of special educational need make excellent progress. The more able and gifted and talented students achieve exceptionally well in science, the school's chosen specialism by the end of Year 9. Standards are average in the national tests, GCSE and A-level examinations in Year 13, and

slightly above average in Year 12. In 2006, Year 9 students successfully met the specialist school targets in English and mathematics and were extremely close to the target in science. GCSE results are rising and in 2006, more students than in previous years attained five or more A\* to C grades, that included English and mathematics. Whilst most minority ethnic groups attain good GCSE grades, a small proportion from African and Caribbean descent are not achieving as well as their peers. The school is successfully using mentoring and achievement projects to support them. The school sets challenging academic targets, which most students strive to attain.

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

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

Pupils' personal development and well-being, including the social, moral, spiritual and cultural dimensions, are good with some outstanding features. Relationships between students are generally harmonious and they have a secure understanding of the impact of their actions on others. Students are proud of their school, enjoy coming, and most attend regularly, points confirmed by many in discussion and letters to the inspectors. They particularly appreciate the very positive encouragement to make their views known and to take responsibility for aspects of school life such as exerting their influence on the recruitment of teachers, films at lunchtime, and their involvement in policies such as that on anti-bullying. Many students make a difference to others through: their international work in South Africa, local work in the allotment, coaching programme and as representatives on the safer neighbourhood panel.

Students display a sensible regard for the safety and well-being of each other and show a sensitive awareness of customs and cultures other than their own. Behaviour is good overall. Students explained that maintaining healthy lifestyles is high on their agenda. For example, a sub-committee of students regularly monitor menus and increasingly, many participate enthusiastically in physical activities such as dance and fitness programmes, their favourite activities. Students are well prepared for future economic well-being through their good progress in basic skills and their involvement in work-related learning activities, particularly in the school's specialist area of science.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

Teaching and learning are good. Warm working relationships support learning in most classrooms. Students respond well to the calm, encouraging atmosphere that pushes them to take risks in their responses. In a successful English lesson for Year 9, for example, well-managed group work and collaborative working between students facilitated much independent learning. Questioning was well targeted and the wide range of activities helped maintain all students' interest. The school recognises that there are many good features to the quality of teaching and learning and is taking appropriate action to ensure that the best practice is spread widely, and all aspects of teaching and learning, such as feedback and marking are consistently good or better in order to accelerate progress further.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

**Grade: 1**

**Grade for sixth form: 1**

The curriculum is very well planned. It provides a broad range of opportunities for students to pursue. For example, students are given various options to pursue specific interests in the sciences or to select different qualifications from discrete progression routes. Students are increasingly selecting extra science subjects as an option. One of the school's outstanding strengths lies in the distinctive flexibility of the 14-19 curriculum. The curriculum is kept under review and is being broadened further to provide more vocational and academic routes for students. Creativity and opportunities are at the heart of the curriculum as students can also choose to broaden their knowledge and skills in classical studies, music, and an extensive range of enrichment activities and extended after school programme. All of this makes an important contribution to student's personal development, particularly as the school works very closely with a number of partner institutions to provide a much varied curriculum.

## **Care, guidance and support**

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

Care, guidance and support are good and the pastoral provision is outstanding, which contributes effectively to pupils' personal development. Vulnerable students and those with learning difficulties and disabilities are mostly exceptionally well supported. Arrangements for promoting students' health and safety are well thought-out and are secure. Students report that there is always someone to turn to when in need of support. The school works well with an extensive range of external agencies to promote students' welfare and to guide them in career choices as they move through the year groups. External mentors alongside school staff, regularly provide good role models to inspire students to achieve.

Academic guidance is increasingly well managed. Procedures for checking students' academic progress are developing well and are thorough. There is an increasingly effective range of initiatives to support students who are not achieving well enough both in the main school and in the sixth form.

## **Leadership and management**

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

The school is effectively led and managed. The headteacher has the full support of the senior team and middle managers who have a good understanding of the school's work. She has inspired staff and provided clarity of vision in raising standards further, which is at the centre of the school improvement plan. The school is still evolving and its self-evaluation of what needs to be done is well founded. This has resulted in clear planning for improvement, which has identified the weaknesses and use of the specialist status to raise standards and improve teaching. The professional development of staff is given a high priority. For example, leadership ensures that the benefits of training are spread widely and staff are trained in-house to take

on responsibilities. Governors are very well informed. They hold the school to account through monitoring, reviewing and keeping the budget under scrutiny.



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## Annex A

## 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?	1	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2
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	3
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	2	

### 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	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
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	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	1
<b>How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?</b>	2	2

<sup>1</sup> 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**

<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	2	
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**

15 May 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Alexandra Park School, London, N11 2AZ

Thank you for welcoming us during the inspection of your school. We enjoyed spending the day with you and particularly appreciated your openness and willingness to talk to us about your school.

Well, I am sure that you will not be surprised that the inspection found that Alexandra Park is a good school with some outstanding features. Your headteacher is an exceptional leader who has worked very hard with the senior team, governors and all staff to establish and make APS a successful school. Your school uses the motto, 'Success for All' often, as it is determined that all of you should succeed. Your school sets you challenging targets and each year, your results and progress in the tests and examinations get better. Most of you are doing well because you enjoy coming to school, behave well in lessons and are keen to learn. These are all positive factors that contribute to you making good progress and have placed your school in the top 20% of all schools nationally. In fact, your progress in English is outstanding and those who have a statement of special need also make excellent progress because they respond so well to the exemplary support.

You recognise that your teachers and other staff give you good quality support and care for you. We agree with you and your parents that they 'push you to do better'. The choice of courses available to you in Year 10 and in the sixth form is excellent. The Saturday school, the very good range of programmes and clubs, are tailored to suit your needs. All of this and your responsibilities in school, the community and international link to South Africa contribute to you receiving an effective education.

Your school recognises that it still needs to continue to do better. It has already drawn up a detailed plan of action and we agree that there are two main areas that need to be worked on to help you make faster progress. You told us that practical activities in science and the use of laptops help you to learn more. Well, the school will be developing the specialist science status to improve your results. Teachers with responsibility for a subject will also be making sure that their area is performing well by regularly monitoring and reviewing the work of their team.

We left the school confident that it will continue to improve. We wish you the best for your future success at Alexandra Park.

Carmen Rodney HMILead inspector