

Aldworth Science College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	116427
Local Authority	Hampshire
Inspection number	312304
Inspection dates	12–13 March 2008
Reporting inspector	Michael Merchant

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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	581
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Bob Lock
Headteacher	Mrs Julie Churcher
Date of previous school inspection	22 June 2004
School address	Western Way Basingstoke RG22 6HA
Telephone number	01256 322691
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Age group	11-16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is much smaller than average. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is above average. The majority of students are of white British origin and the proportion of students from ethnic minority groups is below average. There are below average numbers of students who are in the early stages of learning English. There are more students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities than average. Students' specific needs are very wide ranging and include significant numbers with physical difficulties, hearing or visual impairment and dyslexia. The school has been designated a specialist school in science since October 2002. It is a fully extended school with extensive before and after school community provision.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school. It has many outstanding features because it has continued successfully on its journey of improvement since the last inspection. The headteacher provides outstanding leadership. She inspires and supports staff and students to get the best out of themselves and others.

As a result, students are proud of their school and enjoy it greatly. Most parents are very complimentary about the school and support and value its work. One parent said 'This is a great school...I am very glad I chose to send my children here.' Standards have risen, markedly in some respects. From below average on entry to the school, they are average by the end of Year 11 and all groups of students make good progress. This is because staff are ambitious for their students and fervent in their aim to get the best from each one, academically and personally. Every effort is made to ensure that all students are included and supported. Students achieve well not just because teaching and learning are good and the curriculum is outstanding, but because they are encouraged to see their potential and are given the self-confidence to work hard and aim high.

Students' personal development is outstanding. Staff have created a school in which all students get on well together. Students grow tremendously in confidence, courtesy, respect for others, and in their appreciation of how they can contribute in the community and the wider world. A very positive atmosphere permeates the school. Relationships are exceptionally strong. Teachers and support staff work very effectively to meet students' specific needs, and especially for those students with physical disabilities. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Rare occurrences of bullying are dealt with very effectively.

Extensive and effective procedures are used to monitor, evaluate and improve the quality of teaching and learning which have enabled the school to meet the challenging targets it sets itself. Thorough, systematic observation of lessons is undertaken. Whilst many lessons are of good or even outstanding quality, learning is occasionally slowed when teachers do not always plan well enough to meet the wide range of needs in their classes.

The strength and popularity of the curriculum are such that it is playing a major part in improving standards and attendance rates. The result is that an increasing proportion of students now progress to further education, to follow both academic and vocational programmes. The well-established work of senior staff, heads of year and tutors, provide outstanding care, guidance and support for students, as well as encouraging them to show initiative across a range of activities. Consequently, students feel very safe and very much enjoy school. Performance data is used very well to track the progress of students, to identify those who are underachieving and to prompt intervention to improve their performance. The school's specialist status as a science college is highly visible, permeates work in many areas of school life and contributes tangibly to students' good achievements.

Leadership and management are outstanding. Senior staff are both supportive and uncompromising in their pursuit of outstanding provision and outcomes in all areas of the school. The school improvement plan shows a richness in its aims for developing confident, skilled and successful young people. There is a strong sense of teamwork and pride in what has already been achieved. The school has outstanding capacity for further improvement because performance in all areas of school life is evaluated accurately and because there is a determination from staff at all levels to sustain and build upon the many gains of recent years.

The school is not at all complacent and whilst celebrating existing strengths and successes, it knows exactly what to do to improve further on its road to excellence.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that more lessons are of the quality of the best, so that every lesson builds well on students' existing skills and knowledge.
- Ensure strategies to raise achievement and standards at Key Stage 4 are consistently implemented across the school.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students' standards on entry to the school, in Year 7, are below average and the reading ages of many are well below their actual age. They make good progress during their first three years, attaining standards that are broadly average at the end of Year 9. Standards at Key Stage 3 have been rising steadily over the last four years. Students' progress in mathematics and science is much better than that seen in English which is satisfactory.

Students continue to make good progress as they move from Key Stages 3 to 4. Standards were average at the end of Year 11 in 2007, a sharp improvement over 2006. Standards were just below average in both English and mathematics, but had improved significantly over the previous year. There are strong signs of students' current standards sustaining this improvement. Externally marked tests and the schools' tracking of progress show standards are continuing to rise and are now just above average in Years 10 and 11. Overall, all groups of students make good progress as they pass through the school.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Personal development is outstanding and makes a significant contribution to the progress students make in all aspects of school life. Students develop into well-rounded and mature young citizens by the time they leave. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Parents are aware of what the school does to teach them about right and wrong and say: 'The school teaches our students their subjects and also about how to live moral lives.' Students are considerate and friendly. They are encouraged to be themselves. Students enjoy their education and are happy and proud members of the school community. Attendance levels have risen significantly in recent years, thanks to the effective measures the school uses to follow up absences and are now currently slightly above the national average.

Students' opinions on important matters are actively sought through the school council and their views have made a difference, for example in helping to design a garden and a road scheme. Students readily accept responsibilities, for example older students supporting younger students through the mentoring programme, and visiting junior schools. Prefects and peer mentors also make an outstanding contribution to the life of the school community.

The behaviour of students is outstanding, despite being part of a community that welcomes some learners with troubled histories in other schools. Students are courteous and friendly, able to cooperate and help each other. They act safely and responsibly in lessons and around the school. They understand the importance of healthy living and feel secure in the school. They develop successfully the skills necessary for their future well-being, and take advantage

of the very wide range of curriculum and other opportunities matching their capabilities and interests.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good. Typically, lessons are characterised by confident, knowledgeable teaching, in a well-ordered and calm environment. Teachers are good at telling students exactly what they are expected to do in lessons and this helps them make sense of their learning. Students enjoy their lessons and, because there is mutual respect between teachers and students, learning takes place in a harmonious atmosphere. In an outstanding music lesson, for example, the sheer joy and total engagement of the students reflected the boundless enthusiasm of the teacher. In most lessons, students experience a range of approaches and this helps to sustain their interest, so that they can acquire new knowledge and skills. Sustained challenge and high expectations enable students to achieve well over time.

In a minority of lessons, this high level of achievement is not always obtained. This is because teachers do not always plan their work to provide sufficient levels of challenge for students of all abilities. Students are very clear about their subject targets and teachers support students well to reach their goals.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The school provides an outstanding curriculum, which fully meets the needs of its students. At Key Stage 3, courses fully meet the requirements of the national curriculum with religious education taught as a discrete area. Citizenship is taught and reported to parents through the area of personal, social and health education. Other subjects also make a strong contribution to citizenship.

The Key Stage 4 curriculum offers students a variety of guided pathways which ensures that they follow the most suitable courses. Students of all abilities are catered for well. They speak highly of being able to obtain a computing qualification in Year 10 and being able to obtain up to five science GCSE passes, some in Year 10. There are appropriate entry level and vocational courses, some involving day release at local colleges. Provision is outstanding for students with learning difficulties and disabilities. The school is well placed to implement the new diploma lines of learning. The science college status has greatly facilitated its role in leading developmental work in these areas and in enhancing links with neighbourhood schools, colleges and local organisations.

There are very effective arrangements to meet the needs of students who experience difficulties with literacy and numeracy skills as well providing additional after school support for all who want it in Years 10 and 11. These include the very well attended enhancement courses run by all examination subjects at the end of the school day and in the holidays. There is a wide and comprehensive range of extra-curricular clubs, societies, activities and trips organised by the school. These are well supported by students and make a valuable contribution to their learning, their levels of enjoyment and their personal development.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school provides outstanding care, guidance and support. Requirements for safeguarding students and ensuring their welfare are fully met. Arrangements to ensure that students are safe and protected are robust. There is rigorous attention paid to health and safety at school and on visits. Great care is taken to ensure that the large numbers of vulnerable students and those with specific needs receive exceptional care. This is built on careful testing, early diagnosis, regular assessment and a strong and dedicated specialist staff. The school is fully committed to including these students in all the school's activity wherever possible. There are excellent partnerships with the full range of agencies, which work with these young people.

The school has successfully reduced the number of temporary exclusions, and almost eliminated permanent exclusions by putting in place alternative and positive ways of supporting and counselling those experiencing difficulties. This raises their aspirations and self-esteem.

Form tutors, year heads and Key Stage heads provide comprehensive tracking of academic and emotional development of all students. The monitoring and support for vulnerable students and those at risk of underachieving are excellent. The school keeps students' families well informed so that they may play a full part in decisions affecting their children.

Students have a good awareness of the opportunities available to them when they leave the school. There is very good access to information, advice and guidance, in addition to events and activities designed to raise awareness of opportunities that lay ahead.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Leadership and management are outstanding. The headteacher, supported by a highly effective senior team, provides strong and vigorous leadership. She engenders loyalty amongst staff who work with clarity and enthusiasm in aiming to meet the school's high expectations for students' success. Decisions taken are based on a careful and reflective consideration of progress in all areas of school life. As a result, staff morale is strikingly high and the strong camaraderie at all levels contributes to the excellent relationships within the school. They have created an ethos of inclusion that has enabled all students to flourish, particularly those with learning difficulties.

Subject leaders manage their areas well and their rigorous monitoring is leading to rapidly improving standards. The governing body brings a wealth of relevant experience to its deliberations. Governors not only support leaders but also question them assiduously. The school accurately monitors the quality of teaching and students' progress well. Resources are deployed very well, but a shortage of information and computer technology equipment across the school hinders teachers from developing more exciting approaches to learning.

The school has developed its work as a specialist science college well under very able direction. Very close links with primary schools foster a real sharing of expertise and collaboration with Higher Education Institutions which has led to productive science events in the community.

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Inspection judgements

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

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
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	2
The behaviour of learners	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

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

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?	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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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, 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
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

28 March 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Aldworth Science College, Basingstoke, RG22 6HA

Thank you all for the warm welcome you gave us when we visited Aldworth Science College recently. We enjoyed meeting and talking to you. Aldworth Science College is a good school. It has many outstanding features and we know you are very proud of it.

Here are some of the good things about your school.

- You make good progress in your lessons and results in examinations are getting better and better.
- Your behaviour is excellent and you get on well with your fellow pupils. Aldworth is a well ordered school and you look after each other.
- Teaching is good and your teachers are very concerned to make sure that you do as well as you can.
- The care, support and guidance that the school offers you is outstanding and it means that everyone can do well.
- You have an outstanding range of subjects you can study for examinations and you have many opportunities to prepare yourself for more study or for the world of work.
- Your headteacher and other senior staff are excellent leaders and know exactly how to make Aldworth Science College even better.

What we have asked your school to do now.

- Work with you to make standards even higher.
- Make more lessons as good as the best are now.

Thank you once again for making such a helpful contribution to the inspection. We enjoyed watching you learn.

Michael Merchant

Lead Inspector