

King Alfred's (Specialist Sports College)

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123263
Local Authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	314559
Inspection dates	6–7 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Emma Ing HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1712
6th form	352
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Clem Davies
Principal	Mr Nicholas Young
Date of previous school inspection	20 October 2003
School address	Portway Wantage OX12 9BY
Telephone number	01235 225 700
Fax number	01235 760 262

Age group	11-18
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Introduction

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

Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following areas: the personal development and well-being of students; the impact of the physical education (PE) specialist college and training college status on the educational provision of the school; the curriculum; and the effectiveness of senior leaders. Evidence was gathered from the school's self-evaluation form (SEF); national published assessment data and the school's own assessment records; curriculum and planning documents; observation of the school at work; students' work; interviews with staff and students; and the parents' questionnaires. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified and these have been included where appropriate in the report.

Description of the school

King Alfred's is a large comprehensive secondary school that occupies three sites about two miles apart across the town centre in Wantage. It serves this market town and the surrounding villages. There are few children from minority ethnic backgrounds at the school, and although there are students experiencing difficult home circumstances, most are from relatively affluent backgrounds.

The school was designated a Sports College in 1999 and became a training school in 2003. In 2006/7 there were trainee placements in every curriculum area.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

King Alfred's is a good school with outstanding features and good capacity to improve. Its particular strength is in tailoring the provision and support to meet the needs of individual students very well. The school promotes the excellent personal and social development of students and offers an outstanding, broad and flexible curriculum. Senior leaders know the school well and identify priorities for improvement effectively. As a result of these factors students do well and standards are rising.

Students learn to be confident and caring leaders; they support each other very well; they enjoy their education, and in particular, they value enormously the wide range of enrichment activities that the school offers. One student explained that it was a happy school 'where you can be yourself, and nobody judges you' and others agreed, noting that the school supports you to be 'your best self'. The ethos of the school is very positive and students make strong contributions to their own and the wider community through their sports leadership, their involvement in various different representative forums and by acting as peer mentors. They are also involved in music, art, drama and sport and fund raise for charities. The school is careful to introduce students to a wide range of different cultures through trips, expeditions and international days. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students is thus excellent. Although a few parents expressed concerns about the behaviour of students, they themselves say that it is very rare for their learning to be interrupted by others' misbehaviour and the evidence of the inspection indicate that it is consistently good around the school. The school is a safe place to be, and whilst there is occasional bullying, students are confident that staff will always sort it out quickly. Students understand how to live healthily and have good knowledge of how to stay safe. They eat well and exercise regularly.

Students make good academic progress at King Alfred's and reach high standards. The school provides particularly well for the full ability range and thus both those that are gifted academically and those that find things more of a struggle do well. Results at Key Stage 4 have improved over time, and school leaders are ambitious in their long-term targets in this area. However, this is not yet reflected in the individual targets set for students at Key Stage 4. The proportion of students who attain five higher level passes at GCSE is good and the proportion of students who achieve five GCSE passes is very good. Around 8% of students achieved more than eight A* grades at GCSE. The school is aware that some girls of average and below average ability are not doing as well as boys at Key Stage 4 and is addressing this issue with vigour. Performance in English and mathematics at GCSE has been satisfactory but disappointing to the school because students who are borderline have not attained higher level passes.

Standards at Key Stage 3 have been consistently good in mathematics and science but have fluctuated in English. The school has moved to a two year Key Stage 3 and unvalidated 2007 Year 8 results indicate that students have attained standards in line with those in similar schools nationally despite taking the tests a year early.

The sports college specialism has had outstanding impact on the provision of the school and in particular the personal development and well-being of the students. Students of all ages and abilities appreciate the sporting activities on offer to them and there is widespread participation in a huge range of different sports. The school is not, however, exclusive, as one student explained, 'You don't have to be sporty to fit in'. The department matches teaching programmes to the interests and abilities of individuals well. PE itself is very well taught and

all students receive some sort of accreditation during their time at the school. The department has spearheaded many initiatives and provided a driving force for improvement within the school. The support given to students who are talented at sport, which is both practical and emotional, is highly valued by them and enables them to pursue both their sporting and academic programmes effectively. This has provided a model that has been adapted to provide academically gifted students with support, challenge and opportunities, which in turn has enabled the school to prepare a significant number of students for both Oxbridge entrance and degrees in both medicine and veterinary science. In addition, the school has contributed successfully to the development of sport in a large number of local primary schools.

Many of the school's able leaders and teachers are products of the school's own training programmes and much is done to support the professional development of staff who benefit from the close links with higher education institutions. However, the school has not devised systems to monitor closely the impact of its work in this area on outcomes for students.

The curriculum offered in Key Stages 3 and 4 is innovative, broad, and meets the needs of individual students exceptionally well. This is because there is considerable flexibility around the options that students can pursue, particularly once they have completed Key Stage 3 at the end of Year 8. Although recently introduced, it has begun to enable students to achieve very well, as for example, in the case of boys who are opting for vocational courses in sport. There is a wealth of opportunities for students to pursue interests in sport, the arts and intellectual areas after school every day alongside subject support. Participation in these is encouraged and the school takes care to ensure that students are making the most of these. In addition, the school runs very popular trips both at home and abroad, which are carefully planned to ensure that enjoyment is matched by learning and personal development.

Staff are very caring and individual students are supported extremely well in order to enable them to achieve. Student managers work with the Special Needs Co-ordinator and College counsellor effectively to ensure that those experiencing difficulties are well supported. Students speak highly of the mentoring they receive both from other students and from local business people. One explained that the quality of his work has improved since he has been meeting his mentor regularly because 'he talks to me about what I need to do'. Data systems have been set up to enable the progress students make in different subjects to be tracked, however, these are not yet easily accessible to staff and do not readily enable staff to identify different groups that may be underperforming in order to ensure efficient early intervention.

The teaching and learning in the school is generally good with some outstanding and innovative practice. Expectations are high, and students know that they cannot get away with poor presentation or failure to complete work. Many departments are good at providing clear guidance to students about what they need to do to improve their work and at setting curricular targets for them. As senior leaders are aware however, this is not yet consistent across the school. Some good opportunities are made for students to work independently and develop strong study skills.

The school is very well led by the headteacher and his leadership team. This team rigorously self-evaluates the effectiveness of the school and have a very clear understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. They have prioritised important areas for improvement based on their accurate judgements and made significant progress in moving these forward. Leaders are innovative themselves and encourage staff to do likewise, a policy that has supported the school's improvement well. Plans, however, are not always sufficiently focused on quantifiable outcomes and, as a result, the monitoring of progress towards targets by governors and staff is harder

than it might be. Leaders work closely with middle managers to ensure that they too monitor and evaluate their provision but are aware of the need to build independence at this level.

In partnership with the headteacher, governors have been appropriately strategic and they are well involved in evaluating the work of the school. There are significant handicaps associated with operating a school on three sites. In the light of this, resources are managed exceptionally well in order to ensure the high quality of education provided.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The leadership of the sixth form is characterised by a commitment to ensuring that individual students are encouraged and enabled to achieve as well as they can. This, coupled with the strong relationships that students have with staff and consistently good teaching, ensures that students do well in their post-16 studies. Standards they achieve are good with many attaining very good grades as a result of the good progress made. The tracking of the progress made by students in the sixth form is very effective.

The curriculum in the sixth form meets the needs of students at different levels very well and the school has been very successful at enabling their brightest students to gain places at top universities and on highly competitive courses. It has also supported students taking Foundation courses and has been successful in enabling some of these to go on to the Intermediate level.

Despite the hindrance of being based on one of three sites, sixth form students play an important part in the life of the school as a whole. They are given good opportunities to develop responsibility and leadership skills for example in leading charitable events, mentoring younger students, and supporting in the delivery of various after school programmes.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop the management of students' performance data to enable analysis by all staff, sharp intervention and the setting of challenging targets.
- Refine improvement planning by including quantitative success criteria focussing on outcomes for students that can be monitored.

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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?	2	2
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?	1	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	2
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

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	2	
The behaviour of learners	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

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	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?	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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
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	1	
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

19 November 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of King Alfred's (Specialist Sports College), Wantage, OX12 9BY

It was delightful to have the opportunity to speak to so many of you on my recent inspection and also to observe you in lessons and look at your work. I would like to thank you all for the part you played in ensuring that I gathered the evidence to form an accurate picture of your school.

I was very impressed by you, the students. Through the excellent support of your teachers, and in particular, the work of those involved in the sports college initiative, you are developing into confident, well-rounded, positive individuals with excellent interpersonal and leadership skills. I liked the way that good progress is being made by individuals following very different academic paths and that you all feel safe, comfortable and happy at the school. Several of you explained to me that you are very well supported by members of staff and mentors. I judge this aspect of the school's provision to be outstanding in the sixth form.

All of you expressed your appreciation of the opportunities that King Alfred's makes available to you, the trips and the electives. You are rightly proud of the important part that sport plays for all of you at different levels. These are clearly important things that make your school special.

The curriculum at Key Stage 3 and 4 is outstanding because it allows great flexibility so that each of you can follow courses that closely match your abilities, interests and aspirations and it is good in this respect in the sixth form. Most of the teaching in the school is good and there is some that is exemplary.

The school therefore is good and has some outstanding features. This is because the leadership of the headteacher and his senior leadership team is very strong and effective. They know the school well and prioritise appropriately for improvement.

Even in a school, like yours there are always things that can be improved. I have asked the school to:

- develop the ways in which it uses data about your progress to ensure early intervention and challenging targets
- refine their planning for improvement by identifying measurable success criteria and develop the roles of middle leaders to enable them to take a fuller role in this process.

You will be aware that I have written a longer report about King Alfred's explaining my judgements in more detail. I would urge you to have a look at it if you can. You can find it on our website (www.ofsted.gov.uk).

With best wishes for your future success,

Emma Ing

Her Majesty's Inspector