

Royal Alexandra and Albert School

Inspection report

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| Unique Reference Number | 125279 |
| Local Authority | Surrey |
| Inspection number | 315221 |
| Inspection dates | 4–5 June 2008 |
| Reporting inspector | Anne Duffy HMI |

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

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| Type of school | Middle deemed secondary |
| School category | Voluntary aided |
| Age range of pupils | 7–16 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | |
| School | 711 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Mrs Joyce Keegan |
| Headteacher | Mr Paul D Spencer Ellis |
| Date of previous school inspection | 15 November 2004 |
| School address | Gatton Park Reigate RH2 0TD |
| Telephone number | 01737 649000 |
| Fax number | 01737 649002 |

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|--------------------------|---------------|
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Royal Alexandra and Albert School is a comprehensive boarding school set in extensive grounds. A significant proportion of its pupils are from service families, including Ghurkha soldiers whose children joined the school in September. Some pupils are funded by local authorities under the Department for Children, Schools and Families Pathfinder project to place vulnerable young people in boarding schools. In addition, the school's charitable foundation supports some pupils whose home circumstances make boarding desirable. The number of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is above average. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is higher than average. There is high mobility. As a result, attainment on entry, although broadly in line with national averages, varies considerably between pupils and year groups.

The school, which celebrates 250 years since its foundation, came out of special measures in 2002. It is a specialist sports college and holds the Healthy Schools Award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

The Royal Alexandra and Albert is an exceptional school. It is strongly led by the headteacher whose vision for, and commitment to, the pupils is shared by the senior leadership team and the staff. Together they work purposefully to meet the needs of an unusual and diverse school population.

With few exceptions, parents, some of whom are abroad and on active service, appreciate the quality of care and education that the school provides. This is reflected in comments such as 'the care and support my daughter has received have been exceptional and 'we have seen our son blossom this year'.

A key factor in the school's continuing high levels of standards and achievement is a curriculum that is increasingly tailored to meet the needs of its pupils. In Year 6 and Year 11, pupils reach standards that are exceptionally high and make outstanding progress. The school experiences its highest level of mobility during Years 7 to 9, nevertheless standards remain above average and pupils make good progress. Overall, during their time in the school, pupils make outstanding progress.

Robust systems are in place for monitoring the quality of teaching and learning at a whole-school and departmental level. There is much good and outstanding teaching and the school's specialism in sport is used well to raise the quality of teaching and learning even further. Pupils have very good access to computers in many parts of the school although comparatively less in their classrooms. Teachers use technology well, although opportunities for innovative teaching and individualised learning using interactive whiteboards are occasionally missed. Relationships between pupils and staff are extremely good, contributing to pupils' enjoyment of lessons, and staff place an evidently strong emphasis on providing extremely effective care, guidance and support. Complex and thorough systems of tracking and target-setting are in place to monitor and guide pupils, and they are increasingly involved in evaluating their own progress.

Pupils really enjoy coming to school and are very proud of it. Although they would welcome an even stronger voice in the school, they feel that it is safe and friendly and that teachers and other staff are caring and supportive. Personal development and well-being are very strong, positively promoted through the school's social inclusion unit and supported by the school's holistic approach to meeting individual needs. The school deals well with its mobile population; those pupils who were new to the school told inspectors that they had settled in very easily. Pupils have an excellent understanding of how to lead safe and healthy lives. Substantial numbers are involved in helping to run activities in school and in the local community. Many older pupils exercise responsibility, for example through providing support for younger members, and all pupils gain skills which will help them in the future.

The headteacher, senior leaders and governors provide clear direction and manage the school very effectively. They have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school, are ambitious in their planning and have demonstrated that they are committed to continuing improvement. The chair of governors summed this up as she reflected, 'Could we do better? I believe we always can'.

Effectiveness of boarding provision

Grade: 1

The high quality of the boarding provision is acknowledged in the positive inspection report received by the school earlier in the year. The report's recommendation that the school should better promote its school and food councils is being actively addressed. Boarding has significant and positive impact on the personal development of all pupils because non-boarders are very well integrated into the houses. The programme for boarding activities is exceptionally wide. It is open to all and offers many varied experiences, developing skills, which pupils can take forward into their future lives.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in the classroom to increase variation in teaching styles and support for individualised learning.
- Extend pupil representation in the evaluation and further development of the school's work.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

In Year 11, standards reached by learners are exceptionally high. Taking into account the ability of pupils from their starting point, achievement by the end of Year 11 is outstanding, placing the school in the top five percent of schools for the past three years. The percentage of pupils attaining five A* to G grades at GCSE is also significantly above average, reflecting the improvement in progress of pupils in English and mathematics which has increased steadily over the past three years.

In Year 6, standards are exceptionally high and pupils make better than expected progress. In Year 9, standards are above average overall. Years 7 to 9 see the greatest variation in intake and mobility and the school is successfully addressing any variation between groups of learners so that the progress made by pupils is much better than might be expected.

Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good or outstanding progress in all key stages. The school is actively and effectively addressing the learning needs of those who join the school with English as an additional language or with little experience of written texts.

The school is committed to raising levels of achievement further. The attainment and progress of different groups of students are monitored and analysed, and where differences occur, effective action is taken. The school sets ambitious targets. These include those associated with the school's specialist designation for sport, which makes a significant contribution to raising standards and impacts well on students' attitudes to learning. School-generated data indicate that pupils are on track to achieve challenging individual targets for 2008.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development and well being is an outstanding aspect of the school. The spectacular setting enhances a sense of spirituality in a school where social skills are developed and pupils know the difference between right and wrong. Many of them have experienced education elsewhere and they make the most of the opportunities for enjoyment as well as achievement, describing it as 'the greatest school ever'. As a result, attendance is above the national average, which is particularly significant as a number of pupils have previously been

poor attenders at other schools. Pupils respond very positively to the social inclusion support offered by the school saying that it 'works' and that they get 'better' as a result. Behaviour in and around school is very good indeed, and the wide range of cultures and backgrounds is celebrated, creating a rich, varied and tolerant community. Pupils demonstrate a very appropriate awareness of safety and make full use of the range of sporting opportunities so that they become and stay healthy.

There are many examples of pupils taking roles and responsibilities across the school. These include acting as peer listeners, guardians and as readers for younger pupils. The pupils are also very proud of their contributions to the wider community especially in sponsoring orphans in the third world and building a sports pavilion as part of the Duke of Edinburgh scheme. Student voice is more loudly heard than before and school council members are increasingly taking charge of their own meetings although they rightly feel that they could have even greater impact on all aspects of school life.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

The school is resolute in its determination to provide outstanding teaching and this is reflected in the high levels of achievement. Teachers have very good subject expertise and use this effectively to engage pupils' attention. In the continuous drive to meet the needs of the increasingly wide range of learners the school is rightly focusing on encouraging pupils to comment constructively and critically on the work of others and offer suggestions on how to improve. Where this approach is adopted pupils respond with enthusiasm and progress is accelerated. Teachers forge very positive relationships with their pupils; they manage them well, dealing very sensitively with any discipline issues. Learning assistants are well deployed, providing valuable support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and enabling them to be fully included in all lessons. Although there is good provision overall for pupils to access computers, their use for in-class research and individual learning is relatively under-exploited. Similarly, the use of the interactive whiteboard is somewhat limited and mainly used to present the lesson objectives. As a result, its potential as a teaching tool is not used as fully as it could be.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The extensive curriculum exceeds statutory requirements and is under constant review in order to best meet the needs of all learners. The introduction of enterprise education into Year 9 and the comprehensive work experience programme in Year 10 help to prepare pupils for their future economic well-being. There is robust provision for literacy and numeracy, with intervention programs targeted at key groups of pupils. Opportunities to develop ICT skills are evident in many parts of the school, although not always fully exploited in individual classrooms. The introduction of vocational and other new courses into Years 10 and 11 has led to better pupil engagement and achievement. The school is committed to continuing the development of the curriculum in Years 10 and 11 by embracing specialised diplomas and is bidding to deliver the land-based diploma. Creative subjects support participation and specialist sports status has enriched learning opportunities across the school. The range and quality of the extra-curricular

provision for all pupils is outstanding; as one Year 7 pupil said, 'It's great here, there is something for everyone whatever you are interested in.'

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school provides outstanding care, guidance and support for the pupils. Staff are very effective in providing an inclusive, supportive and caring environment in which pupils develop into confident mature individuals. Pupils know the level they are working at and are set challenging targets. There are rigorous systems in place for monitoring their academic progress and for providing follow up support where pupils are working at below target level. Support staff work closely with those who have an identified need, providing excellent support and enabling them to make good progress. The health, safety and welfare of pupils are at the forefront of the school's approach. Statutory requirements for child protection are met and well understood by all. Pupils place a high value on the support and guidance provided when they make decisions about subject choices or progression routes. The work of the pastoral staff and the social inclusion unit has been very effective in re-engaging learners in their education; as one parent says 'My son is walking tall for the first time in his education'.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The leadership of the school is characterised at all levels by a desire to reach and maintain high levels of standards and achievement and ensure that each child fulfils his or her potential. The headteacher provides committed leadership and has moved the school forward significantly since the last inspection. With the support of an able senior leadership team, he has successfully created a management structure in which middle leaders are undoubtedly accountable for their work. Although not immediately evident in its self-evaluation documentation, the school has a very good understanding of its strengths and weaknesses and makes full use of monitoring and evaluation for all aspects of provision. This has led to strategically focused actions, particularly with regard to the school's specialist status and the creation of a nurturing and harmonious environment for learning. These actions have a clear impact upon pupils' achievement. In striving to deliver the most relevant and appropriate education for all its pupils, the senior leadership team are rightly aware that consultative and informative communication with parents will continue to be of great importance as the school goes from strength to strength.

Financial management is extremely thorough and the school has used its resources very well to improve and enhance pupils' learning and living accommodation. Governors have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. They are exceptionally well informed and provide strong challenge and very good support.

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

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| 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

| | |
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| How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners? | 1 |
| 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 effectiveness of boarding provision | 1 |
| The capacity to make any necessary improvements | 1 |

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

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|---|---|
| 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 | 1 |
| The extent to which learners adopt safe practices | 1 |
| How well learners enjoy their education | 1 |
| The attendance of learners | 1 |
| 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 | 1 |

The quality of provision

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|--|---|
| How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs? | 1 |
| 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

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| 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 | 1 |
| The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities | 1 |
| 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

18 June 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Royal Alexandra and Albert School, Reigate, RH2 0TD

Thank you very much for welcoming us to your school. We really enjoyed our visit, particularly the chance to meet and talk to so many of you. I am writing this letter to tell you what we found.

We agree with you that yours is a very special school and we have judged that it provides you with an outstanding education. You told us about the many things there are for you to learn and do and we were pleased to see so many of you taking part in different activities. The curriculum offers you many choices and the staff work hard to help you to feel safe and to support you. We think that teaching is generally outstanding, although we agree that there are a couple of things that teachers could do to make lessons more interesting and to help you develop your own learning. We were very impressed with your behaviour and think that many of you are ready to play an even bigger part in helping your school to develop.

We have asked your school to improve things in two areas:

- make more use of interactive whiteboards and computers in the classrooms to alter teaching styles and help you to work in different ways
- encourage you more to say what you think about all aspects of school life and to have a greater say in what might happen in future.

I hope that you will all continue to try your best and wish you well for the future.

Yours sincerely

Anne Duffy

Her Majesty's Inspector