

# Altwood CofE Secondary School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	110080
<b>Local Authority</b>	Windsor and Maidenhead
<b>Inspection number</b>	325095
<b>Inspection date</b>	11 March 2009
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Angela Corbett 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>	Voluntary controlled
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School (total)	748
Sixth form	91
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mrs Sheila Baker
<b>Headteacher</b>	Miss Kathleen Higgins
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	22 February 2006
<b>School address</b>	Altwood Road Maidenhead SL6 4PU
<b>Telephone number</b>	01628 622 236
<b>Fax number</b>	01628 675 140

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one Additional Inspector. The inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following aspects:

- achievement and standards
- the quality of teaching and learning, particularly in the sixth form
- students' personal development and inclusion
- leadership and management, with particular focus on middle leadership
- the impact of the school's specialist status.

Evidence was gained from lesson observations; discussions with leaders, teachers and students; and the evaluation of a range of documentation. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the 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 this report.

## Description of the school

Altwood is a growing and increasingly oversubscribed, smaller than average sized Church of England school. It operates in partnership with other local schools to provide courses in its sixth form. About a quarter of students come from a variety of different minority ethnic backgrounds, predominantly Asian. Just over one in ten students speaks English as an additional language, although very few are in the early stages. A significantly smaller than average proportion of students is eligible for free school meals. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is just above the national average; however, more than usual have a statement of special educational needs. The most significant groups are those with speech, language and communication difficulties, or moderate learning difficulties. The school has a Specialist Resource Provision Unit for speech and language, with places for up to 20 students. Altwood has had specialist status as a Business and Enterprise College since 2007. The school has achieved the Investors in People award.

## 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. Exceptional leadership and management have sustained the outstanding curriculum and the care, guidance and support that students receive, as well as making significant strides forward since the last inspection. Most notable is its designation as a specialist Business and Enterprise College. This has been well incorporated into school life in a relatively short period of time, particularly in relation to enhancing the curriculum through business-related vocational qualifications and a range of enterprise-linked activities. As a result, students gain relevant qualifications and develop outstanding work-related skills that prepare them extremely well for the future. This is a very harmonious school, and the Church of England ethos shines through in all aspects of school life. Staff at all levels work with commitment and enthusiasm. A strong ethos of care and respect permeates the school, in which the learning and success of each individual are paramount. Parents who responded to the inspection parental questionnaire were overwhelmingly supportive of the school. Almost all thought the school well led and managed, and most considered that they were well informed and that their views were taken into account.

Students make good progress at Key Stage 3 from starting points which are lower than national average, because the school has focused on developing students' learning and thinking skills. All groups of students, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, make good progress at Key Stage 4. For some individuals, progress is outstanding. Attainment has risen significantly in the last three years. The proportion of students achieving five or more grades A\* to C including English and mathematics rose to above the national average, and the proportion is significantly above when functional English and mathematics are included. A very high percentage of students attain five or more GCSE grades A\* to G. In the school's specialist subjects of business, mathematics, and information and communication technology (ICT), results are also good. The students within the specialist provision for speech and language are provided with good support, so that they integrate well into mainstream lessons and, like their peers, make good or better progress.

The headteacher provides exceptional leadership, with a very clear focus on improving the provision and outcomes for all students. Leaders and staff at all levels share this vision, and understand their role and accountability in raising the standards and achievement for all students in the school. Leadership and management have been effectively distributed by engaging a number of capable middle leaders as associate members of the senior leadership team. They have risen to the challenge extremely well, developing their knowledge and expertise within their clearly defined roles of responsibility. Leaders commented on how they felt trusted and respected, and were able to innovate and take on aspects of the school's improvement work. This has significantly strengthened leadership since the last inspection, and built outstanding capacity for future improvement. There is no complacency at any level, and leaders at all levels are involved in self-evaluation and development planning, which leads in particular to improvements in the quality of teaching and learning, and consequently in the achievement of students. The school has developed an excellent range of partnerships to enhance provision and promote community cohesion. These include those with local schools, businesses and a national training provider. Students particularly value the links with businesses, for example the advice given on completing application forms. Governors are strongly supportive through their full involvement in all aspects of school life. They provide high levels of expertise and, when necessary, appropriate challenge.

Teaching and learning are good overall, and some lessons are outstanding. The school's exemplary approach to providing staff with well-targeted and high-quality professional development engages staff and is having a positive impact in the classroom. This is exemplified by the consistent approach to learning taken by teachers across the school. Teachers use a range of strategies, including ICT, to motivate and engage students, so that they generally respond well and enjoy their lessons. In lessons where learning is more active, such as group or paired work, students' enjoyment is notably higher. Teachers are knowledgeable, use questioning effectively, and maintain pace in most lessons; this also helps to encourage students to work productively. Lessons are well planned, and most provide an appropriate level of challenge because the teachers know their students well. However, overdependence on teachers or support staff for learning tends to limit progress for some students. Teachers have high expectations of behaviour, which are usually met. Assessment of students' progress is routinely incorporated into all lessons, with some outstanding practice across the school. Targets are set for students in each subject, and progress against these is regularly reviewed. Underachievement is quickly recognised by the Raising Attainment Team, and carefully planned interventions are put in place. These have a very positive impact on students' academic achievement and personal development.

The outstanding curriculum meets the needs of students, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, exceptionally well. At Key Stage 4, the school provides a very good range of academic and vocational courses, for example leisure and tourism as part of the specialism, or AS mathematics for more-able students. However, the school is not complacent and continually seeks to improve the range of courses and qualifications offered. It is very effectively using its recent designation as a Business and Enterprise College to develop the new National Curriculum at Key Stage 3 in relation to students' development of basic and thinking skills, and so promote more independent learning. The curriculum is further enhanced by an excellent range of activities, visits and overseas trips, for example a trip to Paris for the world rugby cup, the French student exchange visit, and the recent school production of *Beauty and the Beast*. Many of these are linked to the school's specialism, while others focus on study support.

Students receive excellent care, guidance and support. Safeguarding procedures are fully in place. The use of tutorial time is inconsistent, although some good activities to support students' good personal development were observed during the inspection. Excellent relationships between staff and students, and between students themselves, reflect the school's inclusiveness. Excellent support is provided to any student in need and students spoke positively of the support they receive from staff.

Students' spiritual, social and moral, development is outstanding. Personal and cultural development is good overall, and outstanding for some students. They enjoy school and have good attitudes to learning. Although a few students and a small minority of parents expressed concerns that learning is disrupted in a few lessons, behaviour observed was good both in lessons and around school. Attendance has improved because of the school's determined actions. Students make a good contribution to the school and the wider community, for example through the school council and their fund-raising for charity. However, there are limited opportunities for all students to take a wider range of positions of responsibility. Students report that they feel safe in school and that they know how to get help if needed. Students have an excellent understanding about healthy lifestyles, and many participate in a wide range of sporting activities.

## Effectiveness of the sixth form

### Grade: 2

Students acquire outstanding personal qualities that enable them to flourish and be well prepared for their future as mature, confident and thoughtful young adults. Students make the most of opportunities offered to them, particularly from local and national business and organisations. For example, they participated in the recent Young Enterprise programme, with one group winning the local competition. They use their well-developed enterprise skills to raise considerable funds for charity, and spoke with enthusiasm about the recently sponsored 'Max the Cash' event.

The school provides a good range of courses that meet the needs of all students and reflect the Business and Enterprise specialism. A federation with four neighbouring schools enables a wider curriculum to be offered to students. Students spoke very positively of this, and of the arrangements for travel and receiving support. As a result, an increasing proportion are choosing to remain at the school after 16. The school is attracting new students from the locality and retention rates are high. There are good arrangements to monitor provision across the federation, which include quality assurance of teaching and learning.

Attainment on entry for the students who took final examinations in 2008 was below average, because attainment in the school was lower when they were in Year 11. However, this is changing as standards have risen at Key Stage 4 for those currently in the sixth form. Teaching is outstanding, because teachers have good subject knowledge, set high expectations, and use a variety of teaching styles to promote both understanding and independent learning. Teachers develop the skills and foundations that students need for advanced level study, and as a result progress is good overall. For some students and subjects progress is better, for example in business, the applied ICT single award, critical thinking and history. Overall, students achieve standards above the national averages. However, there is some inconsistency between subjects, particularly at AS level.

Students receive excellent care, guidance and support because teachers know their students extremely well. Students appreciate this, and say that it is a key factor in choosing to stay at the school. Individual performance is closely tracked, and any underachievement is addressed through proven intervention strategies. Leadership and management are good, and there is good capacity for improvement.

### What the school should do to improve further

- Build on existing strengths in teaching, and promote students' independence in learning so that that they make even faster progress across the school.
- Provide more opportunities for students to take on roles of responsibility and to make a greater contribution to school life.

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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	<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
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	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	2

**Achievement and standards**

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	2	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> 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/or disabilities make progress	2	

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<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.



### Personal development and well-being

<b>How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	2	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	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
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	1	

### The quality of provision

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

### Leadership and management

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	1	2
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	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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	1	
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	

**Annex B****Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

23 March 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Altwood CofE Secondary School, Maidenhead, SL6 4PU

On behalf of your inspection team, I would like to let you know that we enjoyed the time we spent with you on our recent visit. We would like to thank you for making us feel so welcome and for sharing your views with us in meetings, lessons and around the school. Altwood is providing you with a good education. Some aspects of the school are outstanding.

We hope that you will take the time to read the full report, but I have highlighted the key points below.

- During your time at the school, you all make good progress and achieve qualifications and skills that prepare you extremely well for the next steps in your education and the world of work.
- Your teachers provide you with consistently good and sometimes outstanding lessons, with interesting and varied activities.
- The curriculum is outstanding and is carefully designed to suit your needs.
- Your behaviour is good, and the relationships between yourselves and with your teachers are excellent.
- Staff provide with you very high-quality care, guidance and support, so that your personal development is good overall, and excellent in some respects.
- Your headteacher and staff are highly committed and work with determination to improve the education and care that you receive.

The staff at Altwood always want to improve the opportunities and quality of education offered to you, and we have asked the school to:

- build on improvements in teaching, and promote your independence in learning, so that that you all make outstanding progress
- provide more opportunities for you to take on roles of responsibility and make a greater contribution to school life.

I am sure that you will continue to work hard and make the most of the many good opportunities offered to you. The inspectors wish you every success in the future.

Yours faithfully

Angela Corbett

Her Majesty's Inspector