

Alfriston School

Penn Road, Beaconsfield, Buckinghamshire, HP9 2TS

Inspection dates 10–11 July 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
	This inspection:	Outstanding 1
Achievement of pupils	Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching	Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Outstanding	1
Leadership and management	Outstanding	1
Overall effectiveness of the residential experience	Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- Outstanding leadership and management have led to very high quality provision and excellent outcomes, along with an exceptionally supportive environment in which all students blossom.
- The excellent personal and academic opportunities offered ensure that the school makes a huge difference to the lives of students. As a result, all groups achieve outstandingly well from their individual starting points.
- A high proportion of outstanding teaching enables students to make better than expected progress in English, mathematics and science, and in their personal development.
- Older students attain very good quality accreditation, including GCSEs in mathematics and science, Entry Level qualifications in English and Information and communication technology and BTech qualifications in many other areas by the time they leave the school at the end of Years 11, 12 or 13.
- The vast majority of parents say that their children enjoy school and are rightly very pleased with their children's education.
- 'The school meets the national minimum standards for residential special schools.'
- Behaviour is impeccable. Students say they feel safe. Attendance is above that in other special schools and is similar to mainstream secondary schools.
- Vocational experiences prepare students extremely well for the world of work.
- An outstanding range of experiences for all groups of students in subjects and topics promotes their strong spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The headteacher has a very ambitious vision for the school. Senior leaders and managers place a significant focus on improving staff performance through regular high quality training and checks on their work.
- The governing body makes an excellent contribution to the school's effectiveness and work tirelessly to raise achievement through its regular visits to check teaching and learning.
- The overall effectiveness of the sixth form is outstanding, preparing students exceptionally well for their futures.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed 16 lessons, most jointly with the senior leaders. In addition, the inspectors made a few shorter visits to observe students' learning, and listened to some students read.
- Social care inspectors visited the residences and spoke to a number of staff and students, as well as looking at care procedures and documentation.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior leaders and managers, other staff, members of the governing body, a local authority representative, the head of care and residential staff. Inspectors also spoke to different groups of students.
- The inspectors observed the work of the school and looked at a number of documents, including the school's own information about students' progress, planning and monitoring documents, safeguarding information and students' books and files.
- Inspectors took account of the 18 responses to the on-line survey (Parent View) and spoke to two parents by telephone. The social care inspectors spoke to several parents at the annual prize-giving ceremony. Inspectors also took account of 19 responses to the staff inspection questionnaire.

Inspection team

Denise Morris, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Bernard Payne	Additional Inspector
Wendy Anderson	Social Care Inspector
Jennie Christopher	Social Care Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a residential special school for girls with moderate learning difficulties. About 20 girls reside in the residence for up to three nights weekly, from Monday to Wednesday, mainly due to personal or social reasons. No students stay on Thursday nights.
- A high proportion of students have additional difficulties including autism spectrum disorders, physical disabilities, sensory impairments or social and emotional difficulties.
- The vast majority of students are White British and no students speak English as an additional language.
- A greater than average proportion of students is eligible for the pupil premium (additional funding for those known to be eligible for free school meals, those looked after by the local authority and those from service families).
- The sixth form has its own separate accommodation. Students have opportunities to undertake a wide range of accredited courses and spend some of their time following vocational courses at several different colleges, although most attend the local Berkshire College.
- Alfriston School converted to become an academy in March 2012. When its predecessor school, of the same name, was previously inspected by Ofsted in November 2009, it was judged to be outstanding.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality and quantity of reading and non-fiction books to better meet the ages and abilities of slower readers.
- Ensure that targets for the lower-attaining pupils are shared with parents on a regular basis so that parents can more readily help their child at home.
- Additional good practice recommendations in relation to the residential provision are to ensure that:
 - boarders' individual files contain comprehensive information on the boarder's time at the school, including any records of medical matters and showing how staff will enable them to meet their targets
 - consistent records of checks on fire safety equipment and means of escape routes are maintained
 - records of any restraint used includes evaluation of the incident and the boarders views

Inspection judgements

The achievement of students is outstanding

- Students' attainment on entry to the school is usually well below average for their age due to their moderate learning difficulties or other associated difficulties. Students settle quickly and start to catch up, achieving outstandingly well in all areas of learning.
- All groups of students including those from minority ethnic backgrounds, those with additional needs and those who receive pupil premium funding make similar progress to other students in English and mathematics.
- Most students make better than expected progress in English. More-able students read fluently by Year 9, and write extended compositions and accounts by Year 11. Students of lower-ability also make better than expected progress. A very effective phonics approach (matching letters and sounds) is helping less-able readers to quickly catch up and, as a result, all students acquire at least the Entry Level qualification in English by the time they leave school.
- The quality and quantity of books for the more-able readers are excellent, engaging them very well in interesting topics and a wide range of literature. The range for lower-ability readers is not as good and, as a result, books are sometimes inappropriate to their ages and some students say they are 'babyish'.
- Almost all students make better than expected progress in mathematics and science. This is evident in the way that half of all students acquired GCSEs, and others acquired accredited qualifications in these two subjects over the past three years. It is also evident in students' high quality learning in lessons.
- In mathematics, for example, students in Year 10 showed sustained strong levels of concentration as they create line graphs independently. High levels of challenge ensured that they recognised where they had gone wrong and were able to work out reasons for this by themselves.
- Students' excellent progress in communication was clearly evident in the many conversations inspectors held with them. During lunch with an inspector, Years 8, 9 and 10 students talked enthusiastically about their school expeditions. Links with a similar school in Finland, for example, have enabled lower-attaining students to widen their horizons and improve their personal development through joint activities and visits.
- Students in the sixth form make outstanding progress. This was evident in design and technology where a mixed group of sixth formers were renovating furniture as part of an enterprise scheme. They had researched the task through visits to local shops and on the internet. They told the inspector that they are planning to sell the furniture to raise funds for their next challenge.
- Students make outstanding progress on their vocational courses undertaken at Berkshire College, preparing them extremely well for further training and employment.
- Students eligible for the pupil premium make better than expected progress, particularly in English and mathematics, which is similar to other students in the school.

The quality of teaching is outstanding

- The high quality of teaching across the school is the key to students' successes. It enables all groups of students to make excellent progress in their learning and their behaviour. Very effective questioning and the use of resources that meet the needs and abilities of individual students help them all to fully engage in learning.
- The teaching of English has been improved by the effective training that staff have received in phonics ensuring that the teaching of reading is accurate, helping younger or lower-ability students in particular to begin to catch up and overcome some of their difficulties. As a result, the vast majority make excellent progress in reading.

- Similar improvements are noted in writing, because very challenging expectations by teachers foster high levels of engagement. Evidence in the older students' work experience files shows outstanding writing and exceptional improvement over time.
- The teaching of mathematics is very successful because teachers focus on engaging students practically in tasks and allowing them to work steadily at their own pace to solve problems. This promotes their confidence in working with numbers.
- There are many examples at the school of students using mathematical skills as part of everyday challenges and enterprise, such as growing and selling vegetables, raising chickens and selling eggs and holding cake sales.
- Inspirational teaching in science keeps students on the edge of their seats waiting for their next challenge. Very effective questioning, along with practical tasks and use of students to model examples, ensures that they all stay fully engaged, anxious to find answers.
- Teachers' assessments of students' skills provides very helpful comments to help each student improve further. Teaching assistants are used outstandingly well to promote pupils' learning, self-esteem and confidence. In discussion, students told inspectors that they know how to improve their work because targets are well known to them.
- Teachers engage well with parents, promoting positive partnerships that parents value highly. A few parents of the lower-attaining students, in particular, rightly say they would like information about their child's targets on a more regular basis so that they can help them better at home.
- The quality of teaching in the sixth form is outstanding because it is closely linked to students' abilities and aspirations.

The behaviour and safety of students are outstanding

- Students' behaviour in and around the school is exemplary. Students are polite, helpful and full of support for each other. They regularly undertake jobs, such as feeding the chickens, sorting out the resources, preparing classrooms and clearing away.
- Students say they feel really safe at school. They fully understand the importance of staying safe on the internet and in the community.
- They assured the inspectors that there is no real bullying of any kind at the school, saying that all students get on well. Any teasing, they say, is quickly dealt with. Their excellent behaviour is fostered by some well-focused playground activities such as street dance classes and games that staff regularly provide.
- The vast majority enjoy school greatly. This is evident in their above average, and improving, attendance.
- Students' behaviour and attitudes are very well promoted by the wide range of challenges and exciting learning opportunities which students eagerly want to take part in. As a result, exclusions are low and there are fewer persistent absentees than in other special schools.
- Students talked excitedly about their Duke of Edinburgh Bronze Award and were able to give the inspector a vivid account of their recent trek and the night they spent in a tent. They described their activities confidently. They said that they had 'the most amazing time'.
- The promotion of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent, through the very wide range of exciting activities for both day and residential students. They are fully prepared for their lives after leaving school because of the high levels of trust, support and modelling that staff provide.
- Students' personal development is exceptional. It improves as students get older because of the very high expectations put on them by staff.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The headteacher drives improvement rigorously because of her strong belief that all the students should enjoy their lives, have very high aspirations for themselves and also have fun. She is very

ably supported by the senior leadership team and governors. They have built effectively on the outstanding performance of the predecessor school to maintain outstanding practice and excellent teaching, learning and behaviour.

- The parents who spoke to inspectors, and those who responded to the inspection questionnaires, agree that their children achieve outstandingly well. The strong support for families from the school and residential staff has an important role in the overall wrap-around care. Close links between the school and the residence have a very positive impact on the outstanding quality of care and support and on students' achievements.
- Leaders make very effective use of the national standards for teaching and are uncompromising in their drive to maintain the very high quality of teachers' skills. There are many excellent examples of staff at all levels progressing up the pay scales because of high quality training, which has helped them to improve their effectiveness and seek promotion.
- Leaders rigorously keep checks on teaching and learning. They have recently improved their capacity to do so by extending the leadership team to include some subject leaders. This has ensured that each teacher has regular opportunities to meet with a leader to discuss practice. The governing body is fully involved and ensures that each teacher is provided with feedback to consolidate or improve skills. As a result, leaders are fully aware of which teachers deserve promotion.
- The school has a concerted approach to ensure that all staff have regular training in aspects such as behaviour and phonics, ensuring consistent practice across the school.
- Although the school has become an academy, it has strong links with the local authority responsible for placing students at the school. As a result, it is well supported by the local authority's special educational needs department, which regularly carries out reviews and provides advice on making judgements about the quality of teaching, learning and students' progress.
- There are some excellent links with local schools and businesses helping to develop students' academic and personal skills and providing experiences that will benefit students in the future.
- The high quality range of subjects and topics taught provides outstandingly well for the needs and abilities of all groups. Successful links with families and the residence result in a consistent approach to supporting individual students' needs.
- Leaders successfully eliminate discrimination through their very effective policies and procedures which make sure that all students have equal opportunities to all the experiences on offer.
- Safeguarding procedures fully meet requirements.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body is extremely supportive, proving excellent challenge to leaders. The governors have been instrumental in taking the school into academy status and are fully involved in monitoring provision, checking teaching and behaviour and looking carefully at how well students are doing. They rigorously check how well the school and the residence are doing, so that they have a very clear view of what is working well. Governors have an excellent range of skills which they use to benefit the school. Consistent monitoring and full involvement in evaluating the school's outcomes mean that members know how effective the school is. Excellent management of finances means that the money allocated for students' premium funding is used to enrich the learning of those students. It is used very well to provide additional support so that these students' achievements and progress are at least as good as their classmates. Governors are rigorous about ensuring that the best teachers and staff are rewarded.

Outcomes for residential pupils	are outstanding
Quality of residential provision and care	are good
Residential pupils' safety	is good
Leadership and management of the residential provision	are good

- The boarding provision enables boarders to make outstanding progress in their personal and social development. They also learn to manage their behaviour which leads to them living in a harmonious, supportive and inclusive community where individuality is celebrated and the focus is on ability and not disability.
- Relationships with staff are strong. Boarders are incredibly happy with boarding and are proud of it. Both they, and their parents, speak highly of the boarding team and of the care and support that they provide
- Boarders' behaviour is exceptional. The main focus of behaviour management is positive reinforcement and the school rules focus on good community living, tolerance and respect. Records of behaviour management are maintained; however, records of physical intervention in boarding lack robust evaluation of effectiveness and boarders' comments.
- Boarders access a vast range of activities, which they really enjoy. These are both on site and community based. They enable the development of social skills as well as improving boarders' health and well-being. Staff link activities with safety and independence skills well, but this is not clearly recorded within boarders' individual plans.
- Health care at the school is managed well and appropriate records are maintained. However, records of medical events which take place during the education day are not placed in the boarders' individual files.
- The accommodation meets the boarder's needs and provides a welcoming, homely and friendly atmosphere. Boarders are able to personalise their individual bedroom space.
- Consultation with boarders has improved. This is done via the boarder's communication book and the boarders' forum.
- Boarders feel safe at the school. Their safety is central to the operation of the provision. Robust safeguarding policies and practices are adhered to. This includes a thorough recruitment and vetting process for staff.
- Fire drills and checks of the fire alarm system regularly take place; however, the records are not consistently completed.
- Management of the boarding provision is good. Managers have a clear understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement required. They have recently developed a self-evaluation tool which enhances this.
- The boarding team has the boarders' well-being at the heart of its practice. The team is very supportive of each other and receives regular formal supervision. Both parents and other professionals praise the members for the work they do, for their communication skills and their commitment to the boarders.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

Boarding/Residential provision		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	A school which provides an exceptional quality of care and significantly exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 2	Good	A school which provides a high quality of care that exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 3	Adequate	A school which meets minimum requirements but needs to improve the quality of care it provides.
Grade 4	Inadequate	A school where minimum requirements are not met and the quality of care has serious weaknesses.

School details

Unique reference number	137934
Social care unique reference number	SCO23097
Local authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	403832

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection of boarding provision was carried out under the Children Act 1989, as amended by the Care Standards Act 2000, having regard to the national minimum standards for boarding schools.

Type of school	Academy converter
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Girls
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Girls
Number of pupils on the school roll	125
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	17
Number of boarders on roll	20
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ian Tencor
Headteacher	Jinna Male
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01494 673740
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