

King Alfred's (Specialist Sports College)

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123263
Local Authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	359406
Inspection dates	10-11 February 2011
Reporting inspector	Bill Stoneham

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Comprehensive
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,805
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	391
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mark Craig
Headteacher	Simon Spiers
Date of previous school inspection	6–7 November 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by six additional inspectors. Thirty-four lessons were observed, each taught by a different teacher. In addition, meetings were held with representatives of the governing body, staff and groups of students. A wide range of documentation was scrutinised including: the college's development plan; its self-review; analysis of the attainment and progress of its students; records of lesson observations; policies; and 493 parental questionnaires.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the college's work, looking in detail at a number of key areas.

- Have the recent changes in the curriculum at both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 led to rising levels of attainment that are sustainable?
- How effectively is the college's monitoring of its teaching and learning ensuring that all groups of students are well provided for?
- How effective is the sixth form in meeting the needs of all its students?

Information about the school

King Alfred's is a large, comprehensive, specialist sports college which occupies three sites located in various parts of Wantage. It serves this market town along with the town of Grove and the surrounding villages. Compared to national average figures, few children from minority ethnic backgrounds attend the college. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is also well below average. These relate mainly to moderate learning, or behavioural, emotional and social difficulties.

The college has won many awards. It was designated a sports college in 1999 and became a training school in 2003. It holds a silver Artsmark, gold Sportsmark and an International Schools award. In addition, it has Healthy Schools status and is an Eco School. The college has been recognised as being a national leader as a specialist sports college, following a visit by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) in 2010. During the inspection, staff and students from the college were attending the national sports college annual conference where they contributed with presentations about their work.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

King Alfred's is an outstanding college. It provides all students with a rich and varied education that prepares them extremely well for the next stage in their careers. The provision made by the college for its students' education and their personal, social and emotional development is difficult to fault and its success as a specialist sports college is especially impressive.

The concerted efforts of the headteacher and other senior staff to improve students' outcomes have been most effective. The college has developed at a pace and improvement since the previous inspection has been marked. This is because of the outstanding and visionary leadership of the headteacher and his senior leadership team, and the excellent support from middle leaders. The impressive governing body has a clear vision about how it wants the college to develop. The governors are a highly experienced team who bring an array of skills and experience to the college. They are challenging and determined to secure success, but they are also highly supportive of the headteacher and his team. They are proud of what all staff and students have achieved.

The management of teaching and learning is outstanding, having improved markedly since the previous inspection with a consequent boost in attainment. A particular strength is how new staff are assimilated into the college and quickly emerge as highly effective classroom teachers. Teaching and learning are outstanding with high quality practice being seen in many different departments. Attainment is high with a notable trend of improvement over the last three years. The progress students make is outstanding, but it is strongest in Years 9, 10 and 11. There is some small variation in the progress made by students in Years 7 and 8 because prior attainment information is not used consistently by all staff to ensure that work is pitched to meet individual needs. Appropriately ambitious targets are set for students. Monitoring and tracking at all levels, including in the sixth form, have improved well since the previous inspection and this, too, is helping to accelerate progress.

Students feel safe and thrive because of outstanding care, guidance and support. Managing three diverse sites adds to the complexity of school management, but safeguarding arrangements are consistently good. Attendance has improved strongly and is now above average. The curriculum is outstanding and provides for all students. The introduction of a range of vocational courses has widened choice and resulted in improved GCSE results. The sixth form provides for the learning and personal development of its students well. Attainment is above average and

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improving; tracking data indicate that this trend is likely to continue. However, a small minority of students in Year 12, in particular, do not achieve as well as expected.

The impact of the college's sports specialism is outstanding. Attainment in physical education (PE) is high as witnessed by the Sportsmark award, but the impact goes far further than this. Skills and talents learnt via PE and sport are having an impact on other subjects and contributing to the overall rise in attainment.

Since the previous inspection, attainment has further improved, teaching and learning are far stronger and changes in the curriculum have been embedded, resulting in higher attainment. Many other significant improvements can be highlighted, including better tracking and monitoring and the effectiveness of the governing body. These improvements demonstrate the college's outstanding capacity to improve further.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Accelerate rates of progress in Years 7 and 8 by ensuring that all staff use assessment and other information accurately to make sure that all students are appropriately challenged in all lessons.
- Refine the advisory and tracking procedures in Year 12 to ensure that all students recruited onto AS-level courses have the levels of prior attainment and motivation to ensure success.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

In most lessons, learning is at least good and often better. Students' enjoy their work and are confident learners. The way in which they frequently help one another in their work is a particularly strong feature. For example, in an extremely successful GCSE geography lesson on river features, it was impressive the way students collaborated, discussed salient points and helped each other to secure high standards. In an equally impressive Year 9 history lesson, the students were challenged to examine some quite harrowing, but relevant, cartoons relating to how the Nazis depicted Jewish people. The students were clearly shocked by the images but they handled the material with admirable maturity and the quality of their analysis and responses was impressive. In many other lessons, the articulate way that students expressed their views impressed the inspection team. Several students told inspectors that the quality of their learning had improved. The college monitors the progress of different groups of students well and these procedures have become more robust since the previous inspection. All groups of students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, make comparable rates of progress.

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Students say the college is a safe environment and they are confident that staff will respond effectively to any concerns. Behaviour in lessons is typically outstanding. Around the college and in public areas, it is equally impressive with most students displaying considerable common sense and maturity. The inspection team agrees with parents and staff that behaviour is extremely well managed. Students follow lifestyles that reflect an excellent understanding of health issues. This is reflected in the college having Healthy Schools status. Their understanding of potential risks to their health and well-being is also well developed. The majority of students are actively involved in physical activities. Specialist status promotes such activities extremely well and encourages students to assume responsibility for their own health and well-being, but also act as ambassadors who encourage others to do likewise.

Students have a well-developed sense of right and wrong and value fairness and justice. They have a keen sense of life beyond their immediate locality. Their understanding of multiculturalism and the spiritual aspects of their lives are developing very well and are boosted through the college's international work, including strong support for an educational charity in Uganda. The effectiveness of this work is reflected by an international award gained by the college. Students respond enthusiastically to the many opportunities presented to broaden their experiences of art, music and drama. This commitment has manifested itself in an Artsmark award. Students apply their information and communication technology skills and their well-developed literacy and numeracy skills impressively, across a range of contexts. This makes an excellent contribution to their social development and preparation for working life.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	1
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	1
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	1
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	1
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

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How effective is the provision?

Clear strategies to ensure consistency in teaching and learning are successfully raising attainment. Most lessons are purposeful, busy and enjoyable. Though teaching and learning are not as consistently strong in Years 7 and 8, lessons invariably involve students in a range of learning activities that are well matched to their interests and ability. In many lessons seen during the inspection, learning was outstanding because of the high level of challenge and the frequent opportunities students had to learn by doing things for themselves. Expectations were invariably high with students responding enthusiastically. Marking is good, but on the rare occasions where learning is not as strong, it is because the teachers are not using assessment information consistently in their planning to meet the needs of different groups. In the best lessons, assessment information is used most effectively to ensure different groups of students are set appropriate work. There are, however, some inconsistencies in lesson planning in Years 7 and 8. In a minority of lessons assessment information is not used with sufficient accuracy to ensure that the work set always meets individual needs.

An excellent and continually evolving curriculum is offered. The curriculum, especially in Years 9, 10 and 11, offers breadth and depth and has been thoughtfully enhanced by a range of suitable vocational qualifications. Specialist sports college status has led to further enhancements to the curriculum. As an HMI monitor recently reported, 'The curriculum is an example of best practice as it is innovative in its approach to personalising learning and meeting students' needs and interests.' Enrichment provision is also outstanding and this strength goes well beyond sport, with excellent opportunities for students to participate in music, drama, art and various cultural and social activities which are all successfully designed to improve attainment, confidence and social development.

The college's systems to care for and support students are excellent. All students are valued and considerable care is taken to ensure that transition to college in Year 7 is calm and orderly. Excellent advice is offered about options in Key Stage 4 and staff are aware that there are risks associated with commencing Key Stage 4 12 months early in Year 9. The planning and support offered to ensure a smooth movement between key stages is sensitive and effective. The college utilises its three sites well. The decision to locate Years 7 and 8 on one site, Years 9 and 10 on another and Years 11, 12 and 13 on the third one has been effective and is liked by the students. They enjoy the autonomy. The lack of movement around a busy, bustling market town means that lessons start promptly and the students are not fatigued by the pressure of continually changing buildings. This has helped raise attainment, as have the effective procedures adopted to ensure that attendance, which is above average, continues to improve.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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The quality of teaching	1
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher provides a vision which is communicated clearly and effectively to staff and to students. He and his strong senior leadership team show considerable commitment to obtaining the best outcomes for all groups of students, regardless of their background or level of ability. Leadership and management are strong at all levels and make a significant contribution to improving attainment. The promotion of equality of opportunity and tackling discrimination is excellent, with careful tracking of students' progress and a sense of clarity about how the college will provide for the specific needs of its students. Thus all groups of students make outstanding progress. This is witnessed by successful curriculum innovation. Self-evaluation is detailed and accurate and there is a keen awareness that even though the college enjoys many successes, it can never stop endeavouring to improve further.

Attainment is also boosted by the excellent work the college undertakes in association with an array of partners. Partnership work is an essential component of the college's success as a sports college. In addition to this, theme days, such as the one seen as part of this inspection, rely heavily on partnership working and are an effective vehicle for promoting many aspects of learning beyond the purely academic. The theme day observed during the inspection made a strong contribution to personal and social development, including boosting students' knowledge and understanding of issues such as the justice system and managing personal finance.

The outstanding governing body takes its responsibilities seriously. Governors successfully ensure that the students are safe and that all safeguarding requirements are met well and thoroughly checked. They are also effective in ensuring high quality financial management, so that funds and other resources are available to ensure the college's continued success. Specialist status has also led to the school being at the centre of its local community as well as making valid contributions at a regional and national level. This, together with the college's international work, has helped to ensure that community cohesion is outstanding.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1

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The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	1
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Sixth form

The overall effectiveness of the sixth form is good and improving. Students entering the sixth form, which includes recruits from other schools, have levels of attainment that are broadly average. They leave with results that are above average, indicating good progress. Leadership and management are good and improving, especially in terms of the tracking and target-setting. However, a small minority of students, especially in Year 12 studying AS-level courses, make less good progress than others.

The curriculum has improved significantly and is now excellent in terms of the breadth and depth offered. The provision of more vocational courses has enhanced choice and boosted attainment. Students' personal development is good. They feel safe and show great loyalty to the sixth form and the college. Students are keen to take on responsibility and they enjoy the opportunities to be student leaders and to contribute to various charitable efforts both at home and abroad.

Teaching in sixth form lessons is at least good and occasionally better. In lessons, students benefit from the good subject knowledge of their staff and the good or better progress made owes much to the careful way staff plan lessons to ensure frequent opportunities for independent and collaborative study. In most lessons, staff expectations of what the students can achieve are very high. Care and guidance are good and sixth formers feel well supported. For example, the advice offered on university applications is valued and praised by the students. Systems to increase attendance are robust and effective. The sixth form is expanding and the students attribute this to the improving standards and the opportunities offered.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account:	2

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Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Outcomes for students in the sixth form	1
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	

Views of parents and carers

Over a quarter of parents and carers responded to the inspection questionnaire, which is a higher proportion than that found typically for similar schools. Responses strongly indicate a high level of satisfaction about the quality of education offered, a view that is shared by the inspection team. Many respondents added comments that were overwhelmingly favourable. These comments related to enjoyment, that the college is safe, led and managed well, and that parents and carers are kept well informed. Some concerns were expressed about how the college takes account of suggestions and ideas but no evidence was found to suggest that this is an issue that is impeding the college's progress.

Many respondents praised the college for the quality of education offered, with many commenting that, in their view, the education offered was outstanding. As one parent commented, 'The college's management team is inspirational. They are keen to listen, take on board suggestions and implement improvements. We are privileged to have such a good, solid local facility.' Another respondent, who is responsible for a looked-after child, commented, 'The support and encouragement we receive from all staff are outstanding.' Many others added comments to their questionnaires that were fulsome in their praise of the college. The inspection team agrees with the respondents' view that King Alfred's offers an outstanding level of education.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of students registered at King Alfred's (Specialist Sports College) to complete a questionnaire about their views of the college.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the college.

The inspection team received 493 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1,805 students registered at the college.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	164	33	290	59	26	5	9	2
The school keeps my child safe	177	36	297	60	25	3	2	1
The school informs me about my child's progress	186	38	269	55	25	5	6	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	144	29	290	59	48	10	6	1
The teaching is good at this school	126	26	325	66	26	5	4	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	109	22	293	59	65	13	6	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	136	26	300	61	47	10	2	1
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	184	37	262	53	19	4	5	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	134	27	303	61	41	8	7	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	146	30	279	57	43	9	11	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	99	20	286	58	63	13	8	2
The school is led and managed effectively	166	34	294	60	20	4	5	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	176	36	270	55	29	6	8	2

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



14 February 2011

Dear Students

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

My colleagues and I thoroughly enjoyed our recent visit. I wish to thank you for making us so welcome. We enjoyed talking to you and learning about your views. You told us that the college is a special place and that you are impressed with the education you receive. We agree with you and find that the college is outstanding.

Many things impressed us. You have committed staff who challenge you in your lessons. Many of the lessons we observed were exciting, interesting and challenging and these factors lead to you making exceptional progress in your work and recording levels of attainment that are high in comparison to all schools nationally. You make a highly valid contribution to the outcomes. Your behaviour is outstanding and we were impressed with your attitudes in lessons and how you work together and help one another in your work. Specialist sports status also helps you aim high and you seemed genuinely proud of the college's achievements in sport, but also in other ventures such as drama and music.

Though we are mightily impressed by all your achievements, we have left the college with two areas for further improvement. These are to:

- further raise attainment in Years 7 and 8 by ensuring that all staff use assessment and other information accurately to make sure that all students are appropriately challenged in all lessons
- refine the advisory and tracking procedures in Year 12 to ensure that all students recruited onto AS-level courses have the levels of prior attainment and motivation to ensure success.

We enjoyed meeting you and would like to wish you every success in your future endeavours.

Yours sincerely

Bill Stoneham
Lead inspector

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