



INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

ALDWICKBURY SCHOOL

INTERIM INSPECTION

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

Aldwickbury School

Full Name of School	Aldwickbury School		
DfE Number	919/6016		
Registered Charity Number	311059		
Address	Aldwickbury School Wheathampstead Road Harpenden Hertfordshire AL5 1AD		
Telephone Number	01582 713 022		
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Email Address	head@aldwickbury.org.uk		
Headmaster	Mr Vernon Hales		
Chairman of Governors	Mr Stuart Westley		
Age Range	4 to 13		
Total Number of Pupils	307		
Gender of Pupils	Boys		
Numbers by Age	0-3 (EYFS):	0	5-11: 214
	4-5 (EYFS):	35	11-13: 55
Number of Day Pupils	Total:	304	Capacity for flexi-boarding: 35
Number of Boarders	Total:	3	
	Full:	0	Weekly: 3
Head of EYFS Setting	Mrs Christine Baynes		
EYFS Gender	Boys		
Inspection dates	22 March 2011 to 23 March 2011		

PREFACE

This report is according to the *Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) schedule* for INTERIM inspections. The inspection is a two-day visit with a focus on compliance with regulatory requirements. ISI inspections occur every three years and have two formats, interim and standard, which usually occur in an alternating pattern. The school's next inspection will therefore follow the standard schedule, which includes two visits totalling five days and places greater emphasis on the quality of education and care in addition to reporting on regulatory compliance. The school's previous inspection was in March 2007.

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is the body approved by the Government for the purpose of inspecting schools belonging to Independent Schools Council (ISC) Associations and reporting on compliance with the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010*. The range of these Regulations is as follows.

- (a) Quality of education provided (curriculum)
- (b) Quality of education provided (teaching)
- (c) Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils
- (d) Welfare, health and safety of pupils
- (e) Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors
- (f) Premises and accommodation
- (g) Provision of information
- (h) Manner in which complaints are to be handled

*These Regulations replace those first introduced on 1 September 2003.

Legislation additional to Part 3, Welfare, health and safety of pupils, is as follows.

- (i) The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA).
- (ii) Race, gender and sexual discrimination legislation.
- (iii) Corporal punishment.

The inspection was also carried out under the arrangements of the ISC Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership.

ISI is also approved to inspect the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), which was introduced in September 2008 and applies to all children in England from birth to 31st August following their fifth birthday. This report evaluates the extent to which the setting fulfils the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework published by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and follows the requirements of the Childcare Act 2006 as subsequently amended.

A specific inspection of boarding was not carried out and the report does not contain judgements on the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools. Any comments on boarding arising from this inspection are in the context of the school as a whole. The existing report on boarding was produced in October 2009 by the Children's Directorate of the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) and can be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk under Children's social care/Boarding school.

The inspection of the school is from an educational perspective and provides limited inspection of other aspects, though inspectors will comment on any significant hazards or problems they encounter which have an adverse impact on children. The inspection does not include:

- (i) an exhaustive health and safety audit
- (ii) an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features
- (iii) an investigation of the financial viability of the school or its accounting procedures
- (iv) an in-depth investigation of the school's compliance with employment law.

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1. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

- 1.1 Aldwickbury School is a day and boarding school for boys from the ages of four to thirteen. It currently has 307 pupils on the roll, of whom 35 are in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). The school provides weekly and flexible boarding for up to 35 pupils in Years 6, 7 and 8. The school's main aim is for all pupils to feel secure, cared for and respected so that each may flourish, build their self-esteem and discover their own particular strengths and interests. It strives to lay the sound foundations that will enable its boys to meet the challenges of the next stage of their education. It fosters values of collaboration, service and responsibility. It believes in giving boys a sound grounding in the Christian faith and contributing to their spiritual and moral development.
- 1.2 The school was founded in Harpenden in 1937 and took the name Aldwickbury School on moving to its present site in 1948. The school is managed as a charitable trust, established in 1969, whose trustees govern the school. The school site of twenty acres surrounding the original Victorian mansion has been developed over the years to provide additional academic and sporting facilities. Since its previous inspection in March 2007, a new chairman of governors has been elected, a new head of pre-preparatory department (pre-prep) for boys aged five to seven has been appointed and a middle management team has been created. A new library, dining room and kitchen were opened in 2008. The EYFS comprises two Reception classes for children aged between four and five, and is located within the pre-prep accommodation which was purpose-built in 2001.
- 1.3 The ability profile of the school, as indicated by nationally standardised tests, is above the national average. The majority of pupils leave at the age of thirteen and transfer to senior independent schools, both boarding and day, in the south of England. The majority of pupils are of white British origin. Most belong to families in professional occupations. Thirty-six pupils have been identified by the school as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD), of whom twenty-three receive learning support from the school. None has a statement of special educational needs. Three pupils are classified as having English as an additional language (EAL), all of whom receive support at school.
- 1.4 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school.

2. THE SUCCESS OF THE SCHOOL

The quality of the pupils' achievements and their learning, attitudes and basic skills

- 2.1 Pupils are well educated in line with the aims of the school. They achieve well in their academic and extra-curricular pursuits. Pupils learn effectively throughout all stages in the school. They listen attentively to their teachers. They express their ideas and feelings clearly, and they read and use language maturely. Their writing shows originality. Creativity is displayed strongly in art, and also in music and drama. Pupils develop fluent skills in numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT). Their logical thinking is shown in their approach to scientific experiments. Pupils' standards in extracurricular activities are high. School teams often compete at county and national level in a wide range of sports.
- 2.2 Pupils' attainment cannot be measured in relation to average performance against national norms but, on the evidence available, it is judged to be at least good and for some excellent in relation to national age-related expectations. Pupils follow a broad and challenging curriculum, and on leaving the school, they proceed to senior independent schools which have a high standard of entry. Pupils' performance in lessons and written work confirms this evaluation of the pupils' attainment. This indicates that pupils make good progress relative to the average for pupils of similar ability. Pupils with LDD progress well because of strong support in class and individual tuition. Able, gifted and talented pupils do not always achieve their full potential because sometimes tasks are not sufficiently challenging or do not encourage independent study. Pupils are keen to be involved in academic study and have excellent attitudes to learning. Boys concentrate well as individuals and collaborate constructively with partners and in teams.
- 2.3 Pupils follow a good quality curriculum, which stimulates pupils' interest in learning. The range of subjects includes those of the National Curriculum but goes considerably beyond, for example, in the range of languages studied. Trips and speakers enrich pupils' learning. The scheme of work for personal, social and health education reflects the aims and ethos of the school but covers only a limited range of topics in Years 5 to 8, and allocation of its teaching is not clearly defined. Pupils are offered an interesting variety of extracurricular activities. Wide-ranging sporting options are particularly valued by the boys.
- 2.4 The quality of teaching is good overall and sometimes outstanding and effectively supports pupils' achievements. Teaching is focused on the learning styles of boys. Staff use strong subject knowledge to plan relevant lessons. Resources are used very effectively to reinforce learning. The best lessons are conducted at a brisk pace and challenge pupils to contribute their own ideas so that progress is rapid. However, a few lessons are too directed by the teacher, providing fewer opportunities for pupils to think for themselves. Marking of pupils' work is thorough and includes helpful comments. The school increasingly uses the abundant data from standardised tests and its own assessments to monitor pupils' progress, and to set personal targets.

The quality of the pupils' personal development

- 2.5 Pupils' personal development is excellent and is effectively nurtured by a school community committed to the care and welfare of its pupils. Boys' outlook on life reflects the school's aim of promoting spiritual and moral values based on the Christian faith. Pupils appreciate that life has a spiritual dimension and display individuality and self-esteem. Pupils distinguish between right and wrong and are aware of the choices to be made. They accept the school's code of conduct, understanding rewards and sanctions are necessary and appropriate. Pupils conduct themselves in an orderly, polite and friendly manner, showing respect for peers and staff alike. Pupils of all ages interact very well together. Older boys accept responsibility and befriend and assist younger pupils. Pupils have an appreciation of other faiths and cultures and are tolerant in their attitudes, relating this to the values that underpin the school. They speak enthusiastically of cultural visits both in the UK and abroad.
- 2.6 Pastoral care is of a very high standard and arrangements for welfare, health and safety are effective. Relationships are warm and relaxed; pupils say they feel secure and happy. They are confident that someone will listen sympathetically if they have a problem. Class teachers and tutors support their pupils very effectively. Pupils say that bullying is rare, but when reported to staff, it is swiftly dealt with. The child protection policy is thorough and all staff have received training at the appropriate level. In the past, not all staff recruitment checks have been thoroughly carried out before appointment. However, the school now follows a robust policy. Pupils' health and safety are well managed and policies, including a three-year disability access plan, are sound. Risks are carefully assessed. Admissions and attendance registers are properly maintained and stored. School meals are nutritious, although pupils say the menu lacks variety. Pupils participate in physical exercise every day. The quality of boarding is good and makes a substantial contribution to pupils' personal development and their educational experience. Boarders and their parents speak warmly of the boarding experience, which they feel strengthens pupil relationships and benefits boys' maturity. Boarders particularly enjoy the evening activities.

The effectiveness of governance, leadership and management

- 2.7 Good governance strongly supports the school in fulfilling its aims. Governors offer relevant professional skills although the board is seeking additional expertise and encouraging training. Governors share a common vision with the leadership of the school and exercise prudent financial management to realise their goals. They evaluate the school's achievements at first hand and encourage the further raising of standards. Their statutory and legal duties, including health, safety and safeguarding, are regularly reviewed. In the past governors have not fulfilled their responsibility for the checking of staff appointments robustly, but they now ensure that this is always carried out thoroughly.
- 2.8 Good quality leadership and management strongly support the achievements and the development of the pupils. Pastoral and academic support and monitoring structures work very effectively. A well-defined development plan specifies the school's goals. The introduction of a middle management team has strengthened decision making and communication. The staff appraisal system contributes to the improvement of teaching standards. All staff have received Criminal Records Bureau checks and previous difficulties with recruitment are no longer an issue. Open communication exists with local social services. The premises provide a very

pleasant working environment for all. Buildings and grounds are attractive and considerable care is taken in their upkeep.

- 2.9 The school promotes good relationships with its parents. Parents of current and prospective pupils are provided with the required information about its work. In their responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire, a high proportion of parents expressed their appreciation of the work of the school in the education and care it offers their children. Some parents expressed dissatisfaction with the information received about their children's academic progress. The inspectors agreed that, while parents regularly receive written reports, information in some subject reports lack depth. A significant number of parents expressed the view that the school did not encourage them to be involved in its life and work and the inspection team agree with their sentiments; opportunities for parents to be involved in the life of the school are limited. The school has already recognised this issue. A smaller proportion of parents felt that the school had not handled well their concerns, but the inspection found that the school responses have been sensitive and thorough. A number of parents also stated their concern about the help the school provides for pupils with special educational needs, but in the team's judgement these pupils are provided for effectively. In their responses to the inspection questionnaire a high proportion of pupils said they enjoyed being at the school, they were making good progress with their work, teachers helped them to learn and that they could join in a good range of activities. Some boys felt that teachers were not always fair and did not treat them equally. However, pupils interviewed said they were treated fairly. Some pupils said they would like increased opportunities to express their views to the school leadership and the inspection team agree with their view.

3. ACTION POINTS

(i) Compliance with regulatory requirements

(The range of the Independent School Standards Regulations is given in the Preface)

- 3.1 The school does not meet all the requirements of the Independent School Standards Regulations 2010, and therefore must:
- implement all appropriate safeguarding arrangements [Part 4, paragraphs 19(2)(a) and 22(3)(b), under Suitability of staff and proprietors; and, for the same reason, Part 3, paragraph 7(a) and (b), under Welfare, health and safety].
- 3.2 In order to comply with the learning and development requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage, the school must
- ensure that reports at the end of the EYFS refer clearly to children's attainment against each early learning goal and the EYFS profile assessment scales.

(ii) Recommendations for further improvement

- 3.3 In addition to the above regulatory action points, the school is advised to make the following improvements.
1. Improve the provision for and teaching of the most able pupils to increase their opportunities for academic challenge and independent learning.
 2. Revise the scheme of work and delivery of PSHE to ensure that a wider range of topics is taught to older pupils.
 3. Increase opportunities for parental involvement in the life of the school.
 4. Ensure that children in the EYFS have greater opportunities to develop their ICT skills.

4. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE

4.(a) The overall effectiveness of the early years provision – how well the school meets the needs of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage

4.1 The overall effectiveness of the setting is good with outstanding features. Excellent teaching challenges and motivates the boys, reflecting the uniqueness of each as a valued individual. The new leader and her team are committed to continuous improvement of provision and the achievement of high standards. The caring environment and growing links with older pupils in the school ensure that boys have the best start to their education.

4.(b) The effectiveness of the leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage

4.2 Leadership and management are good with many outstanding features. Detailed policies and procedures, promoting equality and eliminating discrimination, support the efficient management of the setting. Rigorous self-evaluation and discussion ensure continuous improvement towards the school's vision. A strong partnership is well established with parents who say they are very pleased with the school's provision for their children. The school is aware that it has not reported progress to parents against the EYFS profile assessment scales at the end of the EYFS and has plans to rectify this. Provision for boys' welfare, including matters of safeguarding, is outstanding. Effective links with external agencies and attendance at appropriate courses offer valued support for staff. A wide range of good quality resources promote opportunities for independent learning both indoors and outside but opportunities to develop their ICT skills are currently restricted.

4.(c) The quality of the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage

4.3 Provision is good with some outstanding elements. Staff use successful strategies to encourage boys to behave politely and to be friendly and considerate of others. Teaching is outstanding, regular assessment identifies individuals' needs, and planning provides tasks which ensure that each boy makes rapid progress. Interesting topics and skilful questions stimulate and extend the boys' thinking and reasoning. The curriculum is broad and the balance between adult-led and child-initiated activities is planned carefully. Classrooms are cheerful and inviting, the secure play area is satisfactory in size and the extensive grounds are used imaginatively. Specialist teaching promotes swimming and music. The calm, orderly, daily welfare routines create an atmosphere in which the boys feel secure and thrive. The boys are taught to be careful when moving around the school. They are encouraged to wash their hands before eating. Risk assessments are undertaken regularly to ensure that the boys are learning in a safe and healthy environment. Parents and other adults are welcomed into school to share their knowledge and experiences with the boys.

4.(d) Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage

- 4.4 Outcomes are good and sometimes outstanding. Boys enjoy learning and achieve well. They count carefully, add two sets of numbers accurately, and show great enthusiasm when practising their reading and writing skills, for example when writing simple sentences. Their ICT skills are satisfactory. By the end of the Reception year, most boys attain the majority of the early learning goals and some have exceeded them. Boys understand about being safe and the importance of healthy eating, and they are learning the need for good hygiene. Their behaviour is excellent; they listen keenly and are confident to make reasoned guesses. They have good social and communication skills, respond positively to adults and are well prepared for the next stage of their education.

Section 3 includes what the Early Years Foundation Stage should do to improve its provision.

INSPECTION EVIDENCE

The inspectors observed a small sample of lessons, conducted formal interviews with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with senior members of staff and with the chairman of governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended registration sessions and assemblies. Inspectors visited the facilities for sick or injured pupils. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined regulatory documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Mr Peter Lee-Smith

Mrs Jane Disley

Mrs Jenny Clayphan

Reporting Inspector

Headmistress, IAPS school

Early Years Co-ordinating Inspector