

22nd May 2015

Dear Parents/Carers

As you are aware Altwood was inspected by Ofsted on the 30th April and 1st May 2015 and I am writing to you to share their findings. The manner in which Ofsted inspections are carried out and how schools are judged has changed considerably in recent years with the outcome always leading to more demanding standards each time. This increased demand has been reflected in judgements made about us and other schools locally and nationally. The governors and I are in agreement with the inspection outcome that Altwood requires improvement. This judgement is completely in line with our own self-evaluation. A large part of this judgement stems from the historical data on student performance. It is particularly pleasing that so many of the actions which have been made since I joined the school in September 2013 have brought about improvements to the all-round education on offer to our students.

"The Headteacher supported by senior leaders and governors, has introduced initiatives that are leading to better teaching."

I suspect a good number of our students, parents and visitors to our school will be surprised by the latest inspection judgement as they often share how impressed they are with the progress being made in many areas of the school. The journey for Altwood to become a good school was never going to be a quick fix however, it is encouraging that Ofsted have acknowledged our capacity to deliver this outcome.

"Leaders have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and the school has identified the key priorities for improvement."

Despite the overall judgement not yet being good the report does highlight many areas of strength and improvement since the last inspection. This confirmation that we are heading in the right direction is encouraging and reinforces our own view that we are on a positive trajectory for future success.

"There is evidence of more rapid progress for current students in lessons and in books. Work is increasingly pitched at an appropriate level and most students work hard and want to do well."

The improvements seen by inspectors owe much to the commitment and professionalism of so many staff and I am determined to further strengthen our staff for September. The addition of two new Assistant Headteachers will do just that and drive our improvements through at pace.

"Pastoral and subject leaders share the common vision of the senior leaders and approach their work with enthusiasm and commitment."

You will see the inspectors have asked us to make improvements in three areas. The most pressing of these is the need to improve the consistency of good teaching, including in the sixth form, so that all students make consistently good progress from their starting points. This was already one of our priorities and it was no surprise that they too had identified underperformance over previous years which needs to be addressed.

"The school has made improvements in the standard of teaching since the last inspection, but the quality of teaching has not been good enough in many subjects over time."

However, the acknowledgement that we are very clearly addressing this issue is important for us as a school. Alongside an improved curriculum offer for all students is a relentless determination to improve all aspects of school life.

"Leaders have accurately identified areas for improvement in the sixth form and taken prompt actions to address them. They have introduced better systems to track students' progress. Information is now used to plan focused, effective support that enables students who are underachieving to catch up. Historic weaknesses in curriculum design have been addressed and attainment in Year 12 has risen."

I am sure you agree with me there is much that is good or better in our report. Whilst some people will find it hard to look beyond the grades, I can reassure you that both staff and governors remain confident and fully committed to driving the required improvements for everyone at Altwood. I look forward to working with parents and carers to support our future successes.

Yours sincerely,



Neil Dimbleby

Altwood Church of England Secondary School

Altwood Road, Maidenhead, SL6 4PU



Inspection dates

30 April–1 May 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Sixth form provision		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Too few students reach the expected standards in a number of subjects, including mathematics and English.
- Standards in geography, history and science are not good.
- The quality of teaching is not yet consistently good. The best practice present in the school is not shared well enough.
- Some teachers do not use the information they have to ensure the work given to students is at the right level of difficulty.
- The most able students do not reach the highest standards because their aspirations and teachers' high enough in too many lessons
- Students do not always exhibit positive attitudes to learning, particularly where teaching is weaker. They become distracted, behave poorly and do not work hard enough.
- Although most students say they feel safe in school, a small minority of students misuse their mobile phones or social media on the internet. This affects the relationships of some students in the school.
- The sixth form requires improvement as students do not make good progress across many academic courses.
- Teachers with responsibilities are not consistently checking, evaluating and improving the quality of expectations of what they can achieve are not teaching or learning in their teams.
- Many leaders are new and, as a result, improved systems and processes have not fully impacted on students' achievement or behaviour.

The school has the following strengths

- The headteacher, supported by senior leaders and governors, has introduced initiatives that are leading to better teaching
- Standards in French, Spanish and work-related courses are good.
- The progress gap between disadvantaged students and other students in the school and nationally is closing.
- Levels of attendance are rising and exclusions rates are falling
- Provision in the sixth form is improving. The school ensures students only follow appropriate courses. This is raising standards, particularly in the work-related courses.
- Students have a good understanding of British values. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students is strong.
- Governors have a detailed understanding of the school and are playing an active part in its improvement.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 41 lessons, of which 10 were seen jointly with members of the school's leadership team.
- Assemblies and tutorial sessions were visited. The inspection team also made short visits to lessons during a number of walks through the school to look at students' attitudes to learning and behaviour.
- Inspectors held meetings with five groups of students and talked informally to students during breaks and at lunchtimes.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, staff, and senior and subject leaders. Inspectors also spoke to members of the governing body and a representative of the local diocese.
- Inspectors looked at a number of documents including the school's evaluation of its own performance, plans for improvement, policies, and records of students' behaviour and attendance. Safeguarding documents were also scrutinised.
- There were 74 responses to the online survey, Parent View, that were considered. Account was taken of the findings of recent school surveys of the views of 121 families. Inspectors also noted the 54 responses to the staff survey.

Inspection team

Robert Ridout, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Stephanie Matthews	Additional Inspector
Sue Cox	Additional Inspector
Peter Wilkins	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Altwood School is smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- A new headteacher was appointed in September 2013. The current deputy headteacher took up post in January 2014.
- New heads of departments were appointed this academic year to lead history, geography and science.
- Almost three quarters of the students at the school are from White British or Other White backgrounds. One in ten students is from an Asian background and the remaining proportion is from a mixed background. The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is broadly similar to that found nationally.
- The proportion of students supported by the pupil premium, which is additional funding for students who are known to be eligible for free school meals and children who are looked after, is below average.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is above average.
- A small number of students in Years 10 and 11 attend alternative provision off site at local work experience placements organised through Learning to Work.
- The school does not enter students early for GCSE examinations.
- Altwood School works in partnership with Cox Green School, Desborough College, Furze Platt School and Newlands School to provide post-16 courses.
- The school meets the current government floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching, including in the sixth form, so that all students make consistently good progress from their starting points, by:
 - teachers having higher expectations of all students and students having higher aspirations for themselves
 - planning lessons that are pitched at the right level for students and provide challenging opportunities to support students, particularly the most able, in making more rapid progress
 - providing activities that sustain students' interest and motivation to ensure the full engagement and good learning behaviours of students in all lessons
 - sharing the good practice in the school so that all staff support students to learn effectively.
- Consistently apply the school's policies to promote good behaviour in order to support rapid progress and personal development.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management at all levels in the school by ensuring that all leaders and teachers with leadership responsibilities:
 - make sure that the agreed school policies are implemented consistently
 - check the quality of teaching and its impact on students' progress and act on their findings promptly to implement improvements.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management

require improvement

- The new headteacher, senior leaders and governors have an ambitious vision for the school and have set clear, high expectations of the staff. However, these good intentions have yet to embed in the work of the school and produce the required improvements needed to raise the quality of teaching to secure good outcomes for students. Consequently, students are not making enough progress.
- Pastoral and subject leaders share the common vision of senior leaders and approach their work with enthusiasm and commitment. A number of staff are new to their roles and have not yet fully developed the skills required to hold their teams fully to account. Many have a clear understanding of the strengths and areas for development across their departments. However, the improvements they have started to put in place are at an early stage and have not yet had time to bring about the necessary changes to ensure that teaching and achievement are good.
- Leaders have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and the school has identified the key priorities for improvement. The school improvement plan is evaluated rigorously and leaders are working to ensure that school policies and procedures are followed consistently and effectively by all staff.
- Systems to check on teachers' performance focus on ensuring that students make better progress as a result of improved teaching. Objectives are set in line with national Teachers' Standards and successful pay progression and promotion are now closely linked to the good progress students make.
- The curriculum contributes well to the general well-being of the students and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The Christian ethos supports students in understanding the importance of respect and responsibility. This contributes to the improving attitudes of students. Leaders have recently made changes to the curriculum at both Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form to ensure it better meets the needs of students.
- Strategies to improve literacy have been very effective. The Year 7 catch-up funding has enabled strong and effective support to be provided for those students who start at the school with low basic skills in literacy and numeracy. This support has improved the ability of all groups of students to read fluently.
The school has used the funding allocated to disadvantaged students in a variety of ways to support their progress. The school has been successful in narrowing the gap between disadvantaged students and other pupils nationally, especially in mathematics. The use of this funding is routinely evaluated and the school is not complacent and accepts that there is still more to be done to close the gaps.
- The school checks carefully that the small number of students attending off-site provision attend regularly, that they make progress in their learning and there are no concerns about their welfare or behaviour.
- Students in all key stages benefit from a good programme of advice and careers guidance. This ensures that they make well informed choices about their futures.
- The school meets the current statutory requirements for safeguarding. All new staff and governors receive training and know who to refer to if they have concerns over a student's safety. Systems and procedures are effective and there have been no serious incidents since the last inspection.
- In their responses to Parent View and the school's own survey, most parents expressed confidence in the school's leadership and would recommend the school to others.
- The governors and headteacher ensure that the school rejects all forms of discrimination, promotes equality of opportunity and fosters good relationships. The school's emphasis on mutual respect and tolerance prepares students well for life in modern Britain.
- The school's leaders value the continuing and growing support provided through the diocese. Links with partner schools have been established to help further improve the school.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Members of the governing body are passionate about the school and work hard to challenge and support it to bring about improvement. They have carried out an audit of their skills and reviewed their responsibilities in order to improve their effectiveness.
 - The governing body is well informed about all aspects of the school's work. Governors have a good understanding of the most recently published performance information on the school and how well the various groups of students are progressing.
 - Governors rigorously and robustly challenge the headteacher and other school leaders to improve the school further. They routinely hold discussions with subject leaders to check the quality of teaching and its impact on learning and the achievement of students. They are clear about the subjects where teaching needs to improve and the measures that have been taken which are bringing about that improvement.

- Governors understand the importance of improving teachers' performance and have been involved in tackling areas of underperformance. Governors work with the headteacher to ensure that teachers' pay increases are linked to their performance in raising achievement.
- Governors manage finances well and understand how the additional funding is spent and is helping improve the achievement of current eligible students. They ensure that their statutory responsibilities are fulfilled.
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The behaviour and safety of pupils

require improvement

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- A small number of students become inattentive, chatty, and make little effort with their work when the work set is not at the right level or is dull, does not engage or is repetitive.
- Behaviour in the school has improved over the last year because leaders have introduced stricter rules. However, students say that behaviour is poorest when supply teachers teach them. Staff and parents believe that there is room for further improvement and agree that the rules need to be more consistently enforced and supported by all.
- In many lessons, students work hard and take pride in what they are doing. This is reflected by the well-presented work in books. This is because teachers plan learning that takes account of what students know and can already do.
- The number of students who are excluded for a fixed time has reduced. This is because behaviour has improved and leaders have developed a number of effective alternatives to exclusion. However, leaders know that too much lesson time is still lost by some students removed from their normal class.
- At lunch time, morning break and between lessons, students behave sensibly. They are generally polite, respectful, friendly and cheerful. When moving around the school, students are calm and considerate of others. Good behaviour has increased over the last year because of staff increasingly challenging unacceptable conduct.
- Students show respect for their environment. The attractive wall displays are well kept and the site is clean and tidy. Little litter and no graffiti were seen during the inspection.
- A small number of students receive part of their education work placements with local businesses organised through Learning to Work. They behave well and are kept safe. Staff at the school closely monitor this and make sure that students are supported quickly when the need arises.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure requires improvement.
- The school is aware that some students misuse their mobile phones and social media on the internet, and that this can lead to relationship difficulties in school. The school has taken significant steps to address this. Students are given clear guidance in tutor times and in assemblies as to how keep themselves safe online. Reported incidents are falling.
- Students are aware of the different kinds of bullying which may take place. Instances are low and are usually dealt with effectively. School records show that instances of bad behaviours have declined over time.
- The proportion of students excluded from the school is low compared to national figures.
- Students, including those in the sixth form, say that they are kept safe and feel well looked after. Parents and staff agree.
- Attendance is rising and is now close to the national average. This is because students enjoy coming to the school and value the courses they study.
- The site is safe. All visitors are asked to prove their identity and are informed about safety procedures.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- The school has made improvements in the standards of teaching since the last inspection, but the quality of teaching has not been consistently good in many subjects over time. Teaching requires improvement as students have not achieved as well as their peers nationally and have not made good progress, particularly in English and mathematics.
- Teachers generally plan carefully for lessons. Most take account of the learning needs and abilities of students and they respond positively, learn well and progress with confidence. However, some teachers do not always give

students tasks with sufficient challenge and so they spend too long repeating work without moving on. This slows the pace of learning.

- Teachers, including those in the sixth form, are not raising the aspirations of all students. They do not have high enough expectations of the most able students and do not challenge them to think at the higher levels. Consequently, the most able students do not make good progress.
- In some lessons the tasks do not always engage the students' interests. As a result, the students do not focus sufficiently on their learning to make good progress. From this disinterest, some low-level disruption arises.
- Teachers regularly set and mark class and home work. Inspectors saw some good examples of marking and feedback, where students responded positively to advice on how to improve their work and made good progress. However, in some classes the marking was less detailed and students made little or no response to the guidance and so did not make good progress.
- Teachers use questioning well to check students' knowledge and understanding. This helps ensure that few get left behind. When teachers use questioning skilfully, they deepen understanding and students make faster progress.
- Relationships between teachers and their students are good, so students confidently ask for advice when they are unsure about what they are doing.
- Teachers promote students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well, providing opportunities for students to discuss and reflect on moral and social issues or to explore different cultures. There is also a strong focus on promoting literacy in many subjects, with teachers focusing on the correct technical language in a subject and checking on spelling and the use of punctuation and grammar. Teachers encourage reading within classes, but do not consistently plan to develop students' numeracy skills.

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Students' achievement requires improvement because there are variations between subjects, within subjects and between groups of students.
- In 2014, 52% of students gained five or more A* to C grades, including English and mathematics. This was broadly in line with the national average.
- The school has worked to improve teaching and secure better progress by students in English and mathematics. However, the progress of students in both these subjects does not yet match that expected of other students nationally.
- The school's assessments indicate that progress rates lower down the school are stronger and attainment is higher than in previous years. There is no significant difference in achievement between students of different ethnic backgrounds or between those who speak English as an additional language and other students.
- Historically, attainment in science, history and geography has been less than the national average. New subject leaders and new teachers are already having a positive impact on improving students' attitudes to these subjects and increasing their progress rates.
- The most able students in the school are generally making the expected levels of progress, but too few make better than expected progress. In lessons, teachers still do not always plan activities that provide enough challenge to stretch these students and ensure they reach the higher grades and levels.
- Since the last inspection, the attainment and progress of disadvantaged students in both English and mathematics are improving in relation to other students nationally and when compared to their classmates in the school. In the 2014 GCSE results in English, students were less than half a grade behind others in the school and a little over half a grade behind their peers nationally. In mathematics, students were approximately one quarter of a grade behind their peers, both in school and nationally.
- The rates of progress for disadvantaged students currently in the school have increased rapidly, so that those in Year 11 are making very similar progress to their classmates in English and mathematics. The gap in attainment is closing.
- Sixth form students make progress that is below national levels in academic subjects, but above average in work-based courses. Standards are rising and the school's assessments indicate that attainment is rising, especially in Year 12.
- Attainment in Spanish and French is above the national average, as students make good progress in both subjects.
- The progress of students who are disabled or who have special educational needs is improving and is sometimes good. They receive strong support from the special educational needs coordinator and their team. When taught in

small groups, students achieve well as a result of good focused interventions that help them to improve their understanding at an appropriate pace. In some larger classes, teaching does not always provide the support the students need and so progress is slowed.

- Additional funding for those students in Year 7 who need help to catch up with their peers in English and mathematics provides additional teaching support. Almost all these students make good progress.
- Students who attend off-site provision gain valuable work-related qualifications and achieve well due to the specialist provision that is made for them.
- There is evidence of more rapid progress by younger students in lessons and in books. Work is increasingly pitched at an appropriate level and most students work hard and want to do well.

The sixth form provision

requires improvement

- The sixth form requires improvement because some students do not make fast enough progress to fulfil their potential in all subjects. This is because teaching does not always ensure that they can do as well as possible.
- Achievement varies between subjects. For example, the small numbers of students following work-related courses make faster progress than other students. Progress also varies between the stages in the sixth form. Students in Year 12 are making faster progress than those in Year 13. Sixth form leaders are aware of this and have taken actions to address this.
- In the past, not all students followed courses that were appropriate to their needs or abilities. The sixth form curriculum has since been modified and entry requirements raised to address weaknesses. This improved provision is enabling current sixth form students to make better progress.
- Sixth form teachers have good subject knowledge and are effective in supporting students to develop the wider skills they will need for future life. Students say they benefit most from teaching that makes them think, work hard and apply the knowledge and skills they have recently acquired.
- The behaviour of sixth form students is good. The school ensures that students are safe and secure at all times. Students understand fully how to keep themselves safe. They attend regularly and are punctual to lessons. They act as good role models for younger students and play an increasing role in the wider life of the school.
- Students are given good careers guidance and support, including opportunities to develop and enhance their employability skills. As a result, the proportion of students who move from Year 12 into Year 13 is similar to national figures and all students go on to appropriate education or employment when they leave the school.
- Leaders have accurately identified areas for improvement in the sixth form and taken prompt actions to address them. They have introduced better systems to track students' progress. Information is now used to plan focused, effective support that enables students who are underachieving to catch up. Historic weaknesses in curriculum design have been addressed and attainment in Year 12 has risen.

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>

School details

Unique reference number	138342
	Windsor and Maidenhead 462350
Local authority	
Inspection number	462350

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	777
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	138
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sheila Baker
Headteacher	Neil Dimpleby
Date of previous school inspection	1 May 2013
Telephone number	01628622236 01628675140
Fax number	
Email address	altwood@altwoodschool.co.uk

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