

Alexandra Park School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	131758
Local Authority	NA
Inspection number	386749
Inspection dates	15–16 November 2011
Reporting inspector	Martin Beale

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

Type of school	Academy
School category	Non-maintained
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	1423
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	343
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Steph Gold
Headteacher	Michael McKenzie
Date of previous school inspection	3 May 2007
School address	Bidwell Gardens London N11 2AZ
Telephone number	020 8826 4880
Fax number	020 8888 2236
Email address	admin@apsch.org.uk

Age group	11–19
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by six additional inspectors. They visited 48 lessons, observing 47 teachers. They held meetings with staff, groups of students, and members of the governing body. Inspectors observed the school's work, and scrutinised assessment information, students' books, records of students' progress and school improvement plans. Inspectors analysed responses to questionnaires from 415 parents and carers, 182 students and 80 staff.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- How effectively does the school support the academic and personal development of its more vulnerable students?
- How well do teachers use assessment to promote learning within lessons?
- What action has been taken to improve the role of middle leaders and with what impact?
- How effectively do teachers help students to identify how to improve their work and meet their targets?

Information about the school

Student numbers have been steadily rising and the school is now well above average in size. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is above average. The large majority of the students are from a wide range of minority ethnic backgrounds. One-third of the students speak English as an additional language. This is a much higher proportion than usually found. The proportion of students identified with special educational needs and/or disabilities is well above average. Their needs are mostly associated with moderate learning difficulties, often related to literacy. The proportion of students with statements of special educational needs is also well above average. The school has recently been awarded International School status and is one of only 30 National Space Schools.

The school has dual specialisms in science and mathematics, and it is also a Training School. It converted to Academy status in October 2011. The current headteacher has been appointed since the school's previous inspection.

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

Alexandra Park School is an outstanding school. The decisive and inspirational leadership of the headteacher and a highly effective leadership team has enabled Alexandra Park School to continue its journey of rapid improvement since its last inspection. It is a reflective and self-critical organisation which lives its aim to 'put learning first' through its every action. Students are highly motivated learners who make rapid progress from their starting points through outstanding teaching, an excellent curriculum and exemplary care, guidance and support. Attainment is high and rising by Year 11 and in the sixth form.

- Well-established and highly effective systems have supported the improvement of teaching and learning. A significant amount of teaching inspires the students and moves their learning forward at a rapid pace. The school has recognised that students could have more opportunities to use their information and communication technology skills to support learning across subjects.
- The recent focus on making better use of assessment to support learning is implemented successfully in most classrooms. Much skilful questioning engages and challenges the students, which the school has identified as practice it can disseminate into all lessons.
- The rich and diverse curriculum provides many memorable experiences within and beyond the school day. Courses are added and programmes adapted to meet the needs of individuals and groups of students so that everyone has a chance to be successful.
- Students feel exceptionally safe in school because, 'bullying is certainly not tolerated here' as one said and issues they raise are dealt with seriously. Behaviour is good and improving because of the consistent way it is handled.
- The students play a major role in school and community life such as through their representation on the Safer Neighbourhood Panel or organising campaigns on sustainable development. Their excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is reflected in their great consideration towards each other.
- Promoting equality of opportunity and tackling discrimination are central to the school's operation. The staff team works tirelessly to identify and break down potential barriers to learning for individuals and groups of students. Its success is based on knowing its students as individuals and building trusting relationships so that action can be tailored sharply to meet their needs.
- Very effective support built on warm and constructive relationships with staff enables pupils with a statement of special educational needs to make excellent progress towards their targets even if at times the steps are small.

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- The well-led and very effective governing body undertakes its responsibilities in an exemplary manner, particularly in relation to safeguarding the students and planning for greater community cohesion. This includes extensive partnership work and the strong and productive relationships with home.
- A key factor in the school's continual improvement is the pivotal role played by the team of highly effective middle leaders following a concerted approach to improving their expertise through focused professional development.

Sophisticated and accurate self-evaluation is based on a searching analysis of performance. This helps leaders devise exceptionally well-focused plans that have been instrumental in driving improvement forward at pace and securing outstanding outcomes. Leaders and governors do not tolerate complacency and will not allow the school to rest on its laurels in their pursuit of excellence. The rapid progress in recent years and the commitment of governors and leaders to drive up standards further give the school an outstanding capacity for sustained improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Promote creative learning further and share best practice with a focus on:
 - developing teachers' questioning skills
 - providing more opportunities for students to use information and communication technology to support their learning.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**1**

Students are highly motivated and committed to becoming successful. There are many examples where supporting each other and discussing their ideas add greatly to the students' learning and progress. They concentrate for long periods and show considerable determination when they find work difficult. They rise to the challenge presented in the most effective lessons and contribute keenly by answering questions and becoming immersed in practical activities. The specific needs of students speaking English as an additional language are met very well by providing carefully targeted support within lessons. Additional literacy programmes, along with guidance from support staff in lessons, promote the outstanding progress of students identified with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

GCSE examination results have been well above average and rising in recent years. School data indicate that this upward trend is continuing and students in the current Year 11 are on track to meet and in many cases exceed their challenging targets. The proportion of students gaining five good GCSE grades including in English and mathematics is considerably higher than seen nationally, giving them a very secure foundation for future success. Any differences in results by ethnicity are minimal and closing.

The students' great enjoyment of school is reflected in their above average and rising attendance. Students have an excellent understanding of what could constitute an

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unsafe situation and how to deal with it. Students from all backgrounds have an influential voice in the school, and feel listened to and respected. After feedback from students, training was undertaken so that teachers could adopt a more active approach to learning, and homework was restructured to encourage more independent learning. This has led to greater engagement of students in their learning and has contributed to rising standards. The students show great maturity in their outlook on life. A major strength is peer mentoring and the empathy students have for each other. Moral issues are debated constructively and Year 9 students reflected thoughtfully on the existence of God, allowing everyone to express their beliefs. Students can explain what action to take to adopt a healthy lifestyle. A high proportion of students participate in organised sporting activities but not all make the best choices about their diet.

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	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
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

How effective is the provision?

When teaching is at its best, lessons are linked closely to assessment information and tasks challenge the students. Teachers question skilfully to check the students’ understanding and extend their thinking, although in the less successful lessons questions are not used well enough to engage all students. Teachers skilfully assess the learning taking place and adapt their methods and responses accordingly. Reference is made to levels and grades so that students understand and are clear about how to be successful in a piece of work. Opportunities for students to assess their own work and that of others are used to engage and motivate them. Teaching in all three core subjects is a real strength and the English department is exemplary

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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in its practice and performance.

The school’s specialisms in science and mathematics have enabled the provision of a flexible, broad and successful range of science qualifications. Innovative cross-curricular themed weeks such as ‘Darwin’ and ‘Space’ have linked learning creatively between subjects with the latter supported through its partnership with Imperial College to develop space education. Gifted and talented students have opportunities to explore their learning through specific activities including early entry for GCSE in astronomy. Less able students are offered a range of options though a personalised pathway including life skills and a land-based course utilising the school’s grounds in partnership with a local college. A valuable feature is the adaptation of the ‘Smile curriculum’ for students with very complex special educational needs.

A highly principled approach to the promotion of the students’ well-being permeates the school at all levels right up to the governing body. Students, including the potentially more vulnerable, believe in their teachers and trust them to do their very best for them. In conjunction with a very wide range of health and other agencies the school is able to access and coordinate the right mix of interventions to respond to the needs of each individual. Significant internal provision has been created at ‘The Bridge’, a centre offering personalised support for students encountering various difficulties in their lives. Induction into the school is handled sensitively and Year 10 students mentor Year 7 students in the early stages of their secondary school life.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	1
Taking into account:	
The use of assessment to support learning	1
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’s high ambitions for all areas of the school community provide the very clear and shared direction for its future. Expectations of staff and students are high and targets challenging, which helps to give a strong sense of purpose. Leaders are very thoughtful and build on each individual’s capabilities, so allowing them to blossom. Exemplary professional development shaped to individual needs and including a weekly programme of further training has been instrumental in securing improvements, whether this is to teaching expertise or leadership skills. The strong commitment to equal opportunities is shown by the careful monitoring of assessment data to track the progress of key groups. From this strategies and adaptations to the curriculum are carefully targeted to prevent underachievement. As a result, variations in the performance of different groups are now minimal.

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The governing body provides a high level of professional challenge and support for school leaders. Their judgements are based on a very secure understanding of the school's qualities, and they seek detailed evidence to help with critical decisions such as the recent conversion to academy status. The governing body also ensures that procedures for safeguarding the students are robust, and the impact of systems is frequently monitored, reviewed and updated to reflect changing circumstances.

The school is a cohesive, safe and harmonious environment. This emphasis on cohesiveness extends to its actions with the local and wider community. Its work globally, recognised by a national award, is a real strength in conjunction with partner schools in China, Spain and France. A significant link with a school in South Africa has included training projects, support for sustainable development and staff and student exchanges. The school recognises the value its many partnerships bring to the achievement and well-being of the students and also its responsibilities to others. This includes running master classes in science for local primary schools, and supporting the training of teachers. The school strives continually to develop an even closer relationship with home and fulfil its slogan 'Parents make the difference'. Communication includes using modern technology and the school is very successful at engaging with some of its harder to reach groups.

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
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	1
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 effectiveness of the sixth form is outstanding. The sixth form provides a wide range of courses planned carefully to meet the interests and aspirations of the students. This, coupled with the high quality of much of the teaching and the sharp attention to their support and guidance, results in them making excellent progress. Overall examination results of all students are at the very least above average and

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on a trajectory of continual improvement. Students are highly committed to their studies and are aspirational. Their ambitions are high as is reflected in large numbers of students progressing to the most competitive courses and universities. They work with determination as seen in a Year 12 chemistry lesson as they made models of complex molecular structures.

Members of the sixth form make a valuable contribution to school and community life such as when Year 12 students listen to Year 8 read in form time. In partnership with a local charity, students have created short films on issues that affect young people such as sexual health and drug abuse. Students are regularly involved in a wide range of fundraising events and work with the partner school in South Africa. Students appreciate the enrichment programme and the uptake of activities is high. These include sports, a debating society and voluntary work in the local community. This excellent provision is enhanced by high quality induction procedures and carefully targeted support for those students at risk of falling behind in their studies.

The improvement in the sixth form is due to decisive leadership throughout the team and a relentless focus on driving up standards. Students respect the high expectations of staff and strive to achieve the challenges they are set. The rigorous analysis of data underpins very accurate self-evaluation and provides a firm foundation from which to plan to tackle emerging priorities. This gives the sixth form a firm platform from which to meet its future ambitions.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	1
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	1
The quality of provision in the sixth form	1
Leadership and management of the sixth form	1

Views of parents and carers

The proportion of parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire is much higher than the average for secondary schools. The level of satisfaction is above average in response to almost all questions. Inspection evidence endorses parents’ and carers’ very positive views about the school particularly over the quality of teaching and how this meets their children’s particular needs, the progress their children make and how they are prepared for the future, and the way in which their children are kept safe. A small number of parents and carers believed that the school does not help their children to adopt a healthy lifestyle. Inspectors found that the school’s action to help students to have a healthy lifestyle is good, although it is not as strong as other aspects of its work.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Alexandra Park School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

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

The inspection team received 415 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1423 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	194	47	212	51	5	1	1	0
The school keeps my child safe	209	50	199	48	1	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	201	48	197	47	8	2	1	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	177	43	218	53	12	3	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	192	46	212	51	3	1	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	132	32	236	57	32	8	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	92	22	254	61	50	12	3	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)	154	37	208	50	4	1	1	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	149	36	236	57	13	3	1	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	164	40	221	53	10	2	1	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	110	27	249	60	22	5	2	0
The school is led and managed effectively	191	46	204	49	6	1	1	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	222	53	183	44	2	0	1	0

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	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

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 2010 to 08 April 2011 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 2010/11 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.



17 November 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Alexandra Park School, London, N11 2AZ

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave the inspection team when we visited your school recently. You told us you enjoy coming to school and that the school keeps you safe. There are a number of things that we particularly liked.

- Alexandra Park School is outstanding because the headteacher, staff and governors do their utmost to help you all to succeed.
- Exemplary care, guidance and support aid your outstanding achievement and good behaviour.
- Your exceptionally positive attitudes to learning and much improved attendance levels contribute significantly to your progress.
- The curriculum is planned to enable you to progress at a pace which is right for your needs and your science and mathematics specialism permeates across all areas of the school.
- The effectiveness of the sixth form is outstanding.
- The school works exceptionally well in partnership with others to support your learning and has formed strong links with your parents and carers.
- Teaching is outstanding and in most cases effective use is made of assessment data to support your learning and progress.
- You develop an excellent understanding of how to adopt a safe lifestyle.

We have asked the school to ensure that teachers use questions more effectively to involve everyone in class, and have also asked them to provide more planned opportunities for you to use your information and communication technology skills to support your learning across subjects.

We ask you to continue to work hard and be appreciative of the efforts the school is making to help you to be successful.

Yours sincerely

Martin Beale
Lead inspector

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