

The Royal Alexandra and Albert School

Gatton Park, Reigate, Surrey, RH2 0TD

Inspection dates 19–20 September 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Leadership and management at all levels share an ambitious vision that effectively fosters achievement and strongly promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Boarding was not part of this inspection but it clearly shapes and supports the school's inclusive values and breadth of achievement. The rigorous setting of targets for teachers is driving improvement.
- Achievement is steadily strengthening. Attainment is well above national floor standards. All groups make good or better progress, including those with disabilities or special educational needs, those known to be eligible for the Pupil Premium, those with English as an additional language and those who join the school part-way through their secondary education.
- The sixth form is good, with outstanding elements. Growing rapidly, it offers a broad choice of courses, encourages aspiration and fosters independent learning and personal responsibility.
- Most teaching is good or better; much is outstanding. Overall, pupils' learning is well supported by teachers' and learning support assistants' knowledge and enthusiasm, attention to individual needs, constructive assessment and firm but quietly effective behaviour management.
- Pupils are proud of their school and respond wholeheartedly to its emphasis on personal responsibility, community values, mutual respect and acceptance of differences. They feel safe, are extremely well behaved and are justifiably confident that all reasonable steps are taken to ensure their well-being.
- The range of subjects provided is broad and balanced, fulfilling statutory requirements and they effectively support all pupils' needs. The range and quality of out of class activities and visits are outstanding, combining further academic challenge with opportunities to participate in team and individual sports, community service and visual and performing arts.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The analysis and use of assessment information to track the progress of different groups of pupils is not sufficiently robust.
- The curriculum in Key Stage 3 and marking require further review and development.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 32 lessons, looked at pupils’ books, discussed samples of their work with pupils in each key stage and listened to pupils read.
- They discussed professional development, performance management and the effectiveness of teaching and learning with teachers and learning support assistants.
- Inspectors reviewed documents relating to governance, school improvement and the monitoring of teaching and learning. They also considered reports by the local authority’s school improvement adviser.
- They met with the Chairman of the Board of Trustees for the charitable foundation and the Chair of the Governing Body, the school improvement adviser and leaders and managers of core subjects and of the school’s boarding and pastoral support teams.
- Inspectors took into account 157 responses entered on Parent View.

Inspection team

Patricia Metham, Lead inspector

Her Majesty’s Inspector

Sarah Conway

Additional inspector

David Gutmann

Additional inspector

Roger Garrett

Additional inspector

Kevin Morris

Additional inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a co-educational school of average size. It educates pupils from Year 3 to Year 13. The school's numbers have grown steadily since the last inspection, with the establishment of a rapidly expanding sixth form as a key factor. Over half of the pupils are full or weekly boarders and flexible boarding is available to all pupils.
- A significant number of pupils are supported by a charitable foundation set up by an Act of Parliament to provide boarding education for children who have lost one or both parents or carers or whose circumstances make boarding a recommended option. In addition, a substantial number are supported by the Ministry of Defence. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the Pupil Premium is small.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is higher than average, with those of Asian heritage making up the largest group. A slightly larger than average proportion of pupils have English as an additional language.
- A higher than average proportion have a statement of special educational needs or are supported on a school action plus programme. Predominantly these pupils have behavioural, emotional and social development issues or specific learning difficulties.
- Pupils' attainment and progress at Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 exceed current government floor standards.
- The school has specialist status for sport.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Establish greater consistency across Key Stages 2 and 3, particularly in the analysis and use of regularly updated information about pupils' attainment to monitor the progress of different groups.
- Ensure that planning, marking and curriculum development, particularly in Key Stages 2 and 3, more consistently match the outstanding practice seen in many departments, by:
 - building on pupils' prior knowledge and skills
 - always combining, in marking and feedback, encouragement with specific guidance on the steps pupils should take to improve.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 has been above average for five years. Given the range of pupils' attainment on entry, this reflects progress that is significantly better than average. The relative weakness previously observed in reading has been successfully tackled and standards are now in line with other aspects of pupils' learning and are well above average. In 2011, while boys achieved more highly than the national average, they were outperformed by girls. This gap has now almost closed in response to well-targeted interventions and an engaging curriculum. The progress of different groups – rather than of individual pupils – is not always clearly tracked and reflected in planning.
- Entry to Year 7 has more than doubled by new admissions in the past years, and further influx of new pupils changes the make-up of Year 9. The school successfully integrates these pupils and ensures that overall attainment continues to be above average and that their progress is good. The performance of different groups is not, however, specifically monitored and planning does not always build on up-to-date information about pupils' knowledge and skills.
- In Key Stage 4, tracking of progress and identification of individual needs underpin planning and provision. In 2011, about two thirds of pupils gained five or more A* to C GCSE grades, including English and mathematics. Attainment is well above the national average. Provisional results for 2012 indicate that this proportion has increased, and that nine in every 10 pupils gained at least seven A* to C grades at GCSE or equivalent. Particular strengths are in mathematics, separate sciences, English literature, physical education and French.
- Well-managed interventions support better than average progress for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, pupils known to be eligible for the Pupil Premium and those supported by the Foundation or the Ministry of Defence. These interventions include one-to-one tuition, small-group teaching, informal help in the evenings for boarders and very constructive support in lessons from learning support assistants.
- The growing number wishing to join the sixth form has enabled the school to raise its entry requirements and tailor courses more closely to pupils' aspirations and abilities. Provisional AS-level results indicate that the proportion gaining A* to E grades rose from two in every three in 2011 to four in every five in 2012. The number entered for A level rose from seven in 2011 to nearly 70 in 2012, and provisional results show just under half of those achieving A* to C grades. Pupils respond purposefully to challenge; for example, the number choosing to submit extended projects alongside their A-level subjects has increased dramatically and these show ambition and independence in their approach.
- Of the 157 responses on Parent View, almost all express confidence in pupils' progress and this supports inspection findings.

The quality of teaching is good

- Almost all teaching is good or better; there are substantial pockets of outstanding teaching across departments. Nine in every 10 responses on Parent View support this assessment. The emphasis on challenge, teamwork and flexibility by teachers and learning support assistants is demonstrated through their positive attitude to performance management and their readiness to provide support for pupils well beyond the timetabled teaching day. Sixth formers commented that teachers and support staff 'care what we think'. Year 11 pupils identified approachability and subject knowledge as strengths.
- The most effective lessons are characterised by high expectations, underpinned by planning that matches pupils' needs. Teachers respond to unplanned opportunities to develop a line of thought or approach to problem-solving. Pupils are encouraged to evaluate their own work and that of others, drawing on clear guidelines and information about expected levels of attainment. Teachers deploy a range of techniques to check pupils' understanding,

including generally effective questioning skills. They also use a variety of resources, including computers, mixed media and other technology. Pupils are encouraged to investigate and evaluate. Key Stage 4 pupils, for example, are enthusiastic about experimental work in science: 'It gets the whole class involved.' In most lessons, teachers model good language and communication skills.

- Effective teaching skills were seen in a Year 6 English class, for example. The teacher built on up-to-date information about pupils' knowledge and skills and set high expectations for pupils as they set about writing a horror story. She offered frequent challenge by asking pupils to identify strengths and areas for improvement in their own and others' work, giving them clear criteria against which to measure success. In a Year 10 drama lesson, the teacher showed sensitivity and confident skills in setting up opportunities for pupils to be collaborative and creative. Her use of open questions, followed often by 'Why?', prompted pupils to be reflective and to raise the level of their response to each other's performances.
- In the few less effective lessons observed, able pupils were not fully challenged, there were limited opportunities for independent learning and not all pupils were prompted to make a positive contribution in group work. Whereas lesson plans indicated different expectations for the different levels of ability represented, these were not then clearly put into practice.
- The quality of marking is uneven. Much is detailed and constructive, combining encouragement with specific guidance about the next steps to be taken, but there are examples of uncritical praise or commentary that is too sketchy to be useful.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Pupils are emphatic that they feel safe and well cared for. A Year 11 pupil commented, 'We're quite a family.' They are extremely knowledgeable about different forms of bullying, including cyber-bullying and homophobic attitudes, and are clear about how to respond should difficulties arise. Well-trained peer mentors play an important part in supporting pupils who may be finding aspects of school life difficult.
- Pupils' confidence is mirrored by the responses on Parent View, which are exceptionally positive about pupils' behaviour and the school's response to issues. Excellent pastoral care and academic guidance are provided by year and house tutors who very effectively monitor individuals' attitudes and behaviour. Response to inappropriate behaviour is prompt, consistent and effective, as is the response to any signs of distress or loss of motivation.
- Pupils are proud of their school and are keen to uphold its traditions and expectations. Behaviour observed in lessons and around the site was excellent, sensible, considerate and responsive. The school's ethos of mutual respect and support is pervasive and strong.
- Overall attendance figures are affected by factors such as absence allowed when a parent or carer returns from a war zone for a brief period of leave. The school remaining open for boarders when adverse weather conditions keep day pupils at home also has an impact on attendance figures. The school has rigorous systems in place to respond promptly and firmly to unauthorised absence and most pupils attend regularly.

The leadership and management are good

- The school's excellent facilities, increasing pupil numbers and rising levels of attainment are evidence of strong and persuasive leadership by the headteacher, who is very well supported by committed and highly competent leaders and managers at all levels. Members of the senior leadership team have clearly defined roles, which they fulfil with energy and expertise. Almost all the Parent View responses judge the school to be well led and managed.
- Evaluation of strengths and areas for development is thorough and accurate, forming the basis of a realistic and regularly reviewed school improvement plan. Initiatives put in place to tackle identified priorities have had a very positive impact. Capacity for further improvement is outstanding. The local authority continues to monitor and support the

- school's work effectively, mainly through the role of the school improvement adviser.
- Monitoring of teaching and learning is thorough and decisive, with regular lesson observations followed quickly by appropriate professional development to tackle any areas of relative weakness. The impact of this targeted support is carefully monitored and contributes to well-directed performance management. Teachers' targets are linked to national teaching standards. The performance management of individual teachers and support staff is complemented by an extensive programme of in-school training sessions, external courses and visits to observe good practice in other schools. The impact of training is always carefully evaluated to set priorities for future planning. While not all teaching is consistently as good as the best, the proportion that is good or outstanding is high and increasing. New management systems are being put in place to make the tracking of different groups of pupils speedier and more precise, to further strengthen the management of performance.
 - Sturdy foundations are laid in Key Stage 2 for pupils' numeracy, literacy and communication skills, as standards reached at the end of Year 6 demonstrate; more than four in every 10 pupils gain National Curriculum Level 5 for English and for mathematics. In Key Stages 3 and 4, the English department has a strong focus on improving pupils' speaking and writing skills and this is complemented by attention paid to literacy skills in other subjects.
 - The Key Stage 2 curriculum is well designed to meet all needs and engage pupils. Aspects of the Key Stage 3 curriculum are currently under review to combine its secure coverage of National Curriculum requirements with wider opportunities for independent and creative learning. The Key Stage 4 provision meets all needs, offering traditionally academic and vocational options. The increase in numbers has extended options for sixth form students. Most follow academic courses and are ambitious in their higher education choices. A small number follow a more practical programme.
 - Pupil Premium funding has been directed towards provision of one-to-one support in core subjects and for targeted mentoring. It has also been used to provide extension materials, resources and activities to support learning. Evidence of impact is clear. The proportion of pupils eligible for the Pupil Premium who achieved the English Baccalaureate in 2011 was higher than for all pupils nationally. This is an aspect of the school's effective promotion of equality of opportunity, along with its provision for vulnerable pupils and those in need of the school's comprehensive support. The school vigorously tackles discrimination and successfully promotes tolerance and harmony.
 - Safeguarding arrangements are thorough and consistently implemented, including: safe recruitment processes; regularly updated child protection training for all staff; and rigorous health and safety checks and risk assessment.
- **The governance of the school:**
- The Board of Trustees and school governing body work together well to cover all aspects of governance including their statutory responsibilities. The Trustees maintain a firm grasp on financial matters, as well as overseeing the selection of 'foundationers' – pupils supported by the Trust.
 - Governors have a clearly articulated strategic vision and are keenly alert to their responsibility to hold the school to account rigorously. A breadth of relevant experience is represented, which is channelled into committees that cover all aspects of the school's life and work. Following the publication of GCSE, AS and A level results, governors attend departmental review meetings and set challenging, systematically monitored targets when they feel that a department's performance has flagged.
 - In their commitment to support vulnerable children, the Trustees and the governors take a close and continuing interest in pupils' family circumstances. With the Chair of the Governing Body leading by example, all governors are expected to be actively engaged in the school, for example through links with academic departments and boarding houses. They make the most of opportunities to engage with parents and carers at school events and are responsive to feedback coming through parental surveys.

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	125279
Local authority	Surrey
Inspection number	395461

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

Type of school	Middle deemed secondary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	7–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	962
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	133
Number of boarders on roll	430
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	William Gillen
Headteacher	Paul Spencer-Ellis
Date of previous school inspection	4–5 June 2008
Telephone number	01737 649000
Fax number	01737 649002
Email address	headmaster@gatton-park.org.uk

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