



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

**FOCUSED COMPLIANCE INSPECTION
FOR SCHOOLS WITH RESIDENTIAL PROVISION**

ALTON CONVENT SCHOOL

MARCH 2017



School's details

School	Alton Convent School			
DfE Number	850/6073			
EYFS Number	EY403561			
Registered charity number	1071684			
Address	Alton Convent School Anstey Lane Alton Hampshire GU34 2NG			
Telephone number	01420 82070			
Email address	office@altonconvent.co.uk			
Headmaster	Mr Graham Maher			
Chairman of governors	Mr Clive Hexton			
Age range	6 months to 18 years			
Number of pupils on roll	531			
	Boys	138	Girls	393
	Day pupils	526	Boarders	5
	EYFS	158	Juniors	132
	Seniors	202	Sixth Form	39
Pupils' ability	Nationally standardised test data provided by the school indicate that the ability of the pupils is above average.			
Pupils' needs	The number of pupils requiring support for special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is 72. One pupil has an education, health and care (EHC) plan. They require support for a variety of needs, including dyslexia and physical mobility. One pupil has English as an additional language (EAL).			
History of the school	The school was founded as a girls' school in 1938 by the Sisters of Our Lady of Providence. It moved to its present site in 1946. Since that time, it has grown and developed in size and facilities and is now co-educational until Year 7.			

Ownership and governing structure	The founding community transferred ownership to the Alton Convent Trust in 1998 which now, as the Alton Convent School Charity, governs the school.
School structure	The school has four sections. Both the Garden House Nursery, for Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) children, and the prep school for Years 1 to 6, are co-educational. The senior school, for Years 7 to 11, and the sixth form, Years 12 and 13, educate girls only.
Other useful information	<p>An international programme was initiated in 2016. This gives an experience of UK education to sixth-form girls from associated Catholic schools overseas.</p> <p>In January 2017, the school opened a second nursery unit in the nearby suburb of Medstead. This setting was not inspected.</p>
Inspection dates	14 to 15 March 2017

PREFACE

The registration authority for independent schools is the Department for Education (DfE), which directs inspection according to a specified frequency or at any time where the DfE has particular concerns about a school. The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is the body approved by the Secretary of State for the purpose of inspecting schools which are, or whose heads are, in membership of the associations which form the Independent Schools Council (ISC) and reporting on the extent to which they meet the Independent School Standards (“the standards”) in the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014. Accordingly, inspection records whether the school meets each of these standards, which are arranged in eight Parts, each of which is divided into separate paragraphs. The inspection of schools that have early years settings not requiring registration similarly records whether the school complies with key provisions of the Early Years Foundation Stage statutory framework, and for registered settings the full range of the Early Years Foundation Stage provisions is considered. Additionally, the inspection reports on the school’s accessibility plan under Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996. It comments on the progress made by the school in meeting the compliance action points set out in the school’s most recent statutory inspection.

This inspection also contains specific judgements on the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools (‘boarding NMS’). It also comments on the progress made by the school in meeting the compliance action points set out in the most recent statutory boarding inspection and it judges the extent to which the school currently meets the boarding NMS. It identifies any standards which the school does not meet and requires action to meet them. Findings are distributed across sections relating to the eight Parts of the standards.

All association independent schools will have an inspection within three years from April 2016, in accordance with the Framework. The inspection may be of COMPLIANCE ONLY or of EDUCATIONAL QUALITY AND COMPLIANCE depending on a number of factors, including findings from their most recent inspection. Schools judged not to meet the standards, including the boarding NMS, following their inspection may also be subject to a progress monitoring visit before their next routine inspection. The progress monitoring visit will judge whether the school has taken the necessary action to meet any unmet standards and any qualitative concerns identified at their previous inspection.

This is a COMPLIANCE ONLY inspection and as such reports only on the school’s compliance with the standards, including the boarding NMS. The standards represent minimum requirements and judgements are given either as **met** or as **not met**. All schools are required to meet all the standards applicable to them. Where the minimum requirements are not met, this is clearly indicated in the relevant section of the report and the school is required to take the actions specified. In this focused compliance inspection, key regulations and standards have been inspected in detail. These are the regulations on safeguarding; measures to guard against bullying; arrangements for pupils’ health and safety, arrangements to check the suitability of staff; the provision of information to parents; the handling of parents’ complaints; and other related aspects of leadership and management, together with the NMS covering the same areas. The remaining standards and requirements are deemed to continue to be met unless evidence to the contrary has been found.

The inspection does not include matters that are outside of the regulatory framework described above, such as:

- (i) the school’s aims;
- (ii) an exhaustive health and safety audit;
- (iii) compliance with data protection requirements;
- (iv) an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features;
- (v) contractual arrangements with parents;

(vi) an investigation of the financial viability of the school or its accounting procedures.

Where necessary, National Curriculum nomenclature is used to refer to year groups. Links to the full regulations and requirements can be found here: [The Independent School Standards Regulations](#), [National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools](#), [Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework](#).

SUMMARY EVALUATION

The school meets the standards in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools 2015, the requirements of the statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage, and associated requirements, and no further action is required as a result of this inspection.

PART 1

Quality of education provided

The junior school uses its own framework to determine attainment, instead of the national framework.

At GCSE in the years 2012 to 2016, performance has been above the national average for maintained schools.

In the sixth form, A-level results in the years 2012 to 2016 have been above the national average for sixth formers in maintained schools.

The curriculum is documented, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work for the pupils and covers the required breadth of material. The teaching enables pupils to make good progress, encompasses effective behaviour management and is supported by suitable resources. A suitable framework for the assessment of pupils' performance is in place.

The standards relating to the quality of education [paragraphs 1–4] are met.

PART 2

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

Principles and values are actively promoted which facilitate the personal development of pupils as responsible, tolerant, law-abiding citizens. Boarders' views are actively encouraged and their opinions and concerns are appropriately considered by staff. Any prefect system operating in the school is suitably managed.

The standard relating to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development [paragraph 5] and NMS 17 and 19 are met.

PART 3

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils by means that pay due regard to current statutory guidance; good behaviour is promoted; bullying is prevented so far as reasonably practicable; health and safety requirements are met, including those relating to fire safety; provision is made for first aid. Pupils are properly supervised; admission and attendance registers are maintained, as required, and there is a strategic approach to risk assessment. A disability access plan is in place.

An appropriate induction process for pupils new to boarding is implemented, and suitable provision is made for boarders' medical and health care, their food and drink and for managing boarders' laundry and possessions. Boarders have suitable contact with friends and family and access to a programme of activities. Boarding staff are appropriately trained and deployed. The school makes appropriate arrangements to provide lodgings for boarders.

The standards relating to welfare, health and safety [paragraphs 6–16], the requirement of Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010, the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996, and NMS 2–4, 6–12, 15 and 16 and 20 are met.

PART 4

Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

The school makes appropriate checks to ensure the suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors and a register is kept as required. Any visitors to boarders' lodgings are appropriately supervised and the school's arrangements for oversight of boarders are suitably managed.

The standards relating to the suitability of those in contact with pupils at the school [paragraphs 17–21] and NMS 14 are met.

PART 5

Premises of and accommodation at schools

Suitable toilet, changing and showering facilities for pupils and appropriate accommodation for their medical needs are provided. The premises are maintained to a standard commensurate with health and safety; acoustics and lighting are appropriate; water provision is adequate. Suitable outdoor space is provided for physical education and outdoor play. Boarding accommodation is adequate for the needs of all boarders, and safeguards and promotes their welfare.

The standards relating to the premises and accommodation [paragraphs 22–31] and NMS 5 are met.

PART 6

Provision of information

A range of information is variously published, provided or made available to parents, inspectors and the Department for Education. These include details about the proprietor, the ethos of the school and the curriculum, and of the school's arrangements for admission, behaviour and exclusions, bullying, health and safety, first aid, details of the complaints procedure, and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year, and the provision for those with education, health and care plans or English as an additional language. They also include particulars of the school's academic performance during the preceding school year, and its results in public examinations, inspection reports and (for parents only) a report at least annually of their own child's progress. The safeguarding policy is posted on the school's website. A suitable statement of boarding principles and practice is published by the school.

The standard relating to the provision of information [paragraph 32] and statement of boarding principles [NMS 1] are met.

PART 7

Manner in which complaints are handled

Parental complaints, if any, are handled effectively through a three-stage process (informal, formal and a hearing before a panel of three, one of whom is independent of the school). Each stage has clear time scales, and at the third stage the panel can make findings and recommendations which are communicated to the complainant. Records are kept appropriately, including of any action taken, whether or not a complaint is successful, and identifying those relating to the boarding provision.

The standard relating to the handling of complaints [paragraph 33] and NMS 18 are met.

PART 8

Quality of leadership in and management of schools

The proprietors ensure that the leadership and management demonstrate good skills and knowledge, and fulfil their responsibilities effectively, so that the other standards are consistently met and they actively promote the well-being of the pupils. Appropriate leadership and management of boarding ensure that the required policies and records are maintained and effectively monitored.

The standard relating to leadership and management of the school [paragraph 34] and NMS 13 are met.

THE QUALITY AND STANDARDS OF THE EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE

Overall effectiveness: the quality and standards of the early years provision

The overall effectiveness of the early years provision is outstanding.

Children under the age of two make rapid progress relative to their starting points and are very well prepared for the next stage of their education. The quality of planning is excellent, meticulously meeting the developmental needs of the range of children who attend, including those with SEND and EAL, and recognising the value of the 'unique child'. Children's personal and emotional needs are fully met within a gentle and caring environment designed to ensure their safety and well-being and to give them the best start in life. Safeguarding and welfare requirements are fully met by stringent adherence to procedures and a shared understanding of the responsibility of all staff to look after the children. The leadership and management are outstanding, rigorously evaluating practice and undertaking continuous self-evaluations which improve children's life chances.

Effectiveness of leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management is outstanding.

A vision to provide an exciting, happy, caring and safe environment to provide the best start in life is shared palpably by staff across the setting, underpinned by the ethos of respect for the uniqueness of each child and high expectations of performance for children and staff.

Highly effective supervision sessions ensure that staff are fully supported in their roles as key persons. The system of focused performance management embraces current updates in good practice and strongly promotes professional development. Staff are keen to share their training during in-house sessions with their colleagues, for example on planning observations.

Firmly established systems are in place through which staff evaluate the setting, incorporating the views of parents and staff, and measuring performance against succinct criteria, including their impact on outcomes for the children. In the pre-inspection questionnaire and interviews during the inspection, parents expressed particular satisfaction for the regular reports on their children and the provision of information about research into early years education. They feel that their children are happy and well cared for, and that they have complete faith in the staff to provide individualised care. Since the previous inspection, in line with the recommendation, the youngest children are encouraged to make more independent choices where appropriate, for example selecting flavours of breakfast cereal. The introduction of a middle management structure effectively ensures standardisation of practice across the whole EYFS setting. Future plans include the development of the outside area for the baby room to allow free-flow in all weathers.

Learning programmes provide an excellent, well-balanced curriculum which meets the statutory requirements of the EYFS, focusing on the prime areas of learning and meticulously tracking personal achievements against developmental goals to ensure that each child is making appropriate progress. Activities for children under two focus on their individual interests, for example encouraging toddlers to develop vocabulary associated with their passion for trucks. Children benefit from an effective programme of visits, which has also been established in response to the recommendation of the previous report.

Children new to the setting settle quickly and happily because their key persons work closely with parents to ensure that personal needs and interests are met. Children are very well prepared for the next stage of their education, only moving to the next room when they are emotionally and physically ready. These transitions are supported by visits to the new room, accompanied by the key person, and a detailed exchange of information and an introduction to new staff. Opportunities for the youngest children to develop their social bonds during 'family time' sessions are more limited.

The setting actively promotes equality and diversity, respecting the uniqueness of each child and celebrating the cultural heritage of pupils for whom English is an additional language, for example providing stories and displaying vocabulary. British values are promoted actively with posters designed for

younger children and customs observed, for example making pancakes on Shrove Tuesday. Staff model appropriate behaviour effectively and children are encouraged to look after each other, to share and to be kind.

Arrangements to safeguard children meet statutory requirements. Staff undertake regular training to ensure that they understand the need to prevent radicalisation and extremism. Attendance is carefully checked and any absences followed up. Daily safety checks ensure that the environment is safe and comprehensive recruitment checks are in place.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is outstanding.

Staff have exceptionally high expectations of what each child can achieve, carefully tracking their progress against age-appropriate developmental goals and selecting and supporting the appropriate next steps for learning.

Across the setting, staff are specifically trained to ensure a secure understanding of the learning needs of the particular age-group with which they are working, especially those in the baby room where particular skills and knowledge are required. Staff know their key children very well, interpret their needs accurately and communicate their responses appropriately. The securely embedded system of daily evaluation of planning, informed by carefully recorded observations, ensures that individual progress is monitored and guidance sought if required. Tracking books record children's achievements when they are considered to be secure, clearly displaying progress and highlighting any concerns to be followed up.

Parents are fully involved in all stages of their children's learning. Detailed induction notes provide an effective home-school link on entry to the setting, and are followed up by six-weekly assessments and regular, formal invitations to share their child's learning and progress. Parents particularly appreciate the links to online records and the opportunity to add personal contributions. The thoughtful provision of information books addressing child development in the early years is a strong feature of the setting. Equality of opportunity and recognition of diversity are supported by resources to celebrate the cultures of all children within the setting, for example the provision for children to converse in their own mother tongue and access appropriate story books.

Highly effective teaching supports children to acquire the skills and capacity to be ready for the next stage of their learning, facilitated by staff recognition of the importance of emotional readiness to make the move to the next room. Transitions are handled particularly sensitively because they are preceded by several visits to the new environment and the close liaison between the key persons, ensuring that the youngest children gradually become accustomed to the new experience of family times.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

The personal development, behaviour and welfare of the children is outstanding.

Staff know their key children very well, helping them to settle happily and celebrating their successes. The under-twos enjoyed using puppets to illustrate their singing and congratulated themselves by clapping. Even the youngest children excitedly prepare for their daily walks and toddlers are supported to explore the outdoor environment actively, to see what they can find and taking carefully assessed risks.

Children confidently access activities in their room and develop their motor skills as they steer their ride-on toys around the classroom, moving any obstacles in their path. They use their imagination to stage telephone calls and to act out events with small-world toys, using their developing vocabulary imaginatively to add sound effects. They demonstrate a growing awareness of their peers and welcome each other on arrival. Toddlers enjoy exploring their classroom and the opportunities for free-flow to outside activities. However, this facility is not available across the setting in all weathers. The youngest children watch carefully as they shake sensory bottles, fascinated by the noises they have produced.

Strong bonds with their key persons and carefully planned transitions within the setting ensure that children are happy and content. These key people provide highly effective personal care for their children, responding to individual needs and adhering to parents' wishes for training routines, for example making sure that children have their comforters when settling to sleep and quietly supporting them as they wake up.

Across the setting, staff follow the guidelines for promoting caring and thoughtful behaviour and helping children to develop positive relationships with their peers, encouraging them to share and to use kind hands. Older children are guided to understand anti-social behaviour, for example a problem with sharing a toy telephone was effectively solved by finding a second telephone and explaining that they now had one each. Parents appreciated the guidance and information available to help with behavioural issues in younger children.

Children know how to be careful and to look after themselves when, for example, learning to watch out for tree roots when walking in the woods. The younger children do not have access to social media or the internet but care is taken to ensure that photographs are not taken without parental permission and that classroom observations are only recorded on school equipment. Attendance is regularly checked and any absences followed up.

Carefully planned menus ensure that children have a balanced diet, which takes into account any individual requirement. Protocols for administering medicines or first-aid and rigorous hygiene procedures are fully adhered to, ensuring that the children are suitably cared for. Regular walks and outside activities ensure that children have fresh air and exercise in a safe environment.

The carefully planned, age-appropriate programmes for personal development ensure that children are well prepared to respect others and contribute to wider society and life in Britain.

Outcomes for children

The outcomes for children are outstanding.

All children progress rapidly from carefully documented individual starting points, which are informed by initial meetings with parents and accurate and focused observations by key people. The next steps for learning are accurately selected from appropriate developmental guidelines, for example a toddler learning to build a tower of two bricks successfully added a third brick with encouragement from his key person.

The youngest children enjoy the freedom to explore the variety of high-quality toys in their surroundings, supported effectively by their key person. They settle quickly on arrival in the morning, choosing activities independently and focusing on these or looking at books. They eagerly anticipate their daily walk, patiently awaiting their turn to get ready and smiling at their friends while waiting to set off. Toddlers excitedly developed and refined their motor skills by walking confidently in the woods, closely supervised by staff. The children are highly resilient learners, keen to persevere until they succeed, for example investigating a pop-up toy and eventually discovering how to open each box.

Older children demonstrate a growing awareness of their peers, learning to work alongside other children, for example working together to make a train track and making the noises made by the train. They employ their increasingly steady walking to access toys and to explore the outdoor learning area. They join in enthusiastically to rhyme and singing sessions, using puppets to illustrate the stories and demonstrating good recall of the words and actions. At mealtimes, children make sensible, independent choices from, for example, the fruit on offer and feed themselves independently. Staff encourage these choices both at snack times and at mealtimes. Children develop their vocabulary well, learning to link words together and to wave when greeting people, through the encouragement of staff.

Compliance with statutory requirements

The school's registered provision for childcare meets the requirements of the Childcare Act 2006 and no action is required.

Recommendations for further improvement

The school is advised to make the following improvements to its provision for children in the early years.

- Ensure consistent access to covered play areas across the setting for all children.
- Provide children with additional opportunities to develop their social skills through 'family times'.

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

The inspectors observed a small sample of lessons and conducted formal interviews with pupils. They held discussions with teachers, senior members of staff and with the chairman and other governors. They observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended registration sessions and assemblies. Inspectors interviewed boarders and a representative group of those who provide lodging for boarders. They 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 Robin Lewis	Reporting inspector
Mr Stephen Bromley	Compliance team inspector (Deputy head, Society of Heads school)
Mrs Gill Bilbo	Co-ordinating inspector for early years
Mrs Sally Donaldson	Early Years team inspector (Head of kindergarten, HMC school)