



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

Regulatory Compliance Inspection Report

Alton School

January 2022

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School's Details

School	Alton School			
DfE number	850/6073			
Early Years registration number	EY403561			
Registered charity number	1071684			
Address	Alton School Anstey Lane Alton Hampshire GU34 2NG			
Telephone number	01420 82070			
Email address	office@altonschool.co.uk			
Headmaster	Mr Karl Guest			
Chair of governors	Mr Clive Hexton			
Age range	6 months to 18			
Number of pupils on roll	365			
	EYFS	73	Lower	98
	Seniors	177	Sixth Form	17
Inspection dates	19 to 21 January 2022			

1. Background Information

About the school

- 1.1 Alton School is an independent co-educational day school for pupils aged between six months and eighteen years. The school was founded in 1938 by the Sisters of Our Lady of Providence who owned and managed the school until the Alton Convent School Trust charity was established in 1998. The school is a Catholic school from its foundation with a Christian ethos but is open to all denominations and none. The charity is run by a chairman who oversees the school with a board of governors. In September 2018 the school began to admit male pupils into the senior school and sixth form. In April 2020 a new headmaster was appointed. The school is in four sections: Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS); the lower school for years 1–6; the senior school for years 7–11; and the sixth form.
- 1.2 During the period March to August 2020, the whole school remained open only for children of key workers. During this period of closure the school provided remote learning materials for pupils from reception to Year 13.
- 1.3 In the interests of infection control during the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic, inspection evidence was gathered partly remotely and partly on site to reduce contact within the school setting.
- 1.4 In line with the direction given by the Department for Education (DfE) at the time, no evaluation has been made of the nature or effectiveness of any provision made during the period March to August 2020, including its impact on pupils' learning, achievement or personal development. Any concerns relating to pupils' welfare during this period which directly relate to measures implemented by the school have been considered.
- 1.5 During the lockdown period of January to March 2021, all pupils of school age, other than vulnerable pupils or the children of key workers, received remote learning provision at home. The nursery remained open.
- 1.6 In 2020 and 2021, public examinations were not held. For pupils who would have been expected to take these examinations, centre-assessed and teacher-assessed grades were awarded.
- 1.7 Since 2020, EYFS profiles have not been externally moderated.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.8 The school looks to encourage all pupils to be self-confident and adaptable learners by challenging, supporting and encouraging all pupils along their pathway. The school aims to recognise and develop the talents of the pupils and offers co-curricular and enrichment opportunities. In line with its aims, the school prides itself on its family feel, pastoral reputation and wider community relations both at home and abroad.

About the pupils

- 1.9 The pupils come from a range of professional backgrounds, most within a 15-mile radius of the school. Nationally standardised test data provided by the school indicate the ability of the pupils in the senior school to be broadly average. The school has identified 81 pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); of these, 76 receive additional support. Five pupils have an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan. There are four pupils who have English as an additional language, none of whom require extra support for their English. Through analysis of performance data, the school identifies High Performance Learners (HPL) and together with additional pupils across the school are engaged in a bespoke enrichment programme.

2. Regulatory Compliance Inspection

Preface

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is approved by the Secretary of State to inspect schools which are, or whose heads are, in membership of the associations which form the Independent Schools Council (ISC) and report on the extent to which they meet the Independent School Standards ('the standards') in the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014. Inspections of schools with early years settings not requiring registration also report 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, inspections report 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. Inspections also comment on the progress made to meet any compliance action points set out in the school's most recent statutory inspection.

ISI inspections are also carried out under the arrangements of the ISC Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership.

This is a COMPLIANCE ONLY inspection and as such reports only on the school's compliance with the standards. 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 and the school is required to take the actions specified.

Inspections do not include matters that are outside of the regulatory framework described above, such as: an exhaustive health and safety audit; compliance with data protection requirements; an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features; contractual arrangements with parents; an investigation of the financial viability of the school or its accounting procedures.

Inspectors may be aware of individual safeguarding concerns, allegations and complaints as part of the inspection process. Such matters will not usually be referred to specifically in published reports in this document but will have been considered by the team in reaching its judgements.

Links to the standards and requirements can be found here: [The Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#), [Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework](#).

COVID-19: Inspection judgements do not cover the period March to August 2020 inclusive.

Key findings

- 2.1 The school meets the standards in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, 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

- 2.2 In the lower school, the school's own framework for assessment confirms that teaching enables pupils to make good progress in the context of Part 1 paragraph 3(a).
- 2.3 At GCSE in the years 2020 to 2021, performance has confirmed that teaching enables pupils to make good progress in the context of Part 1 paragraph 3(a).
- 2.4 In the sixth form, A-level results in the years 2020 to 2021 have confirmed that teaching enables pupils to make good progress in the context of Part 1 paragraph 3(a).
- 2.5 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.
- 2.6 Pupils receive relationships education in the lower school and relationships and sex education in the senior school, except in so far as they are lawfully excused. The school has consulted parents and published a written statement of its policy which has regard to the relevant statutory guidance.
- 2.7 The standards relating to the quality of education [paragraphs 1–4] are met.**

PART 2 – Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

- 2.8 Principles and values are actively promoted which facilitate the personal development of pupils as responsible, tolerant, law-abiding citizens.
- 2.9 The standard relating to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development [paragraph 5] is met.**

PART 3 – Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 2.10 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.
- 2.11 The standards relating to welfare, health and safety [paragraphs 6–16], the requirement of Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010, and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996 are met.**

PART 4 – Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

- 2.12 The school makes appropriate checks to ensure the suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors, and a register is kept as required.
- 2.13 The standards relating to the suitability of those in contact with pupils at the school [paragraphs 17–21] are met.**

PART 5 – Premises of and accommodation at schools

2.14 Suitable toilet and changing facilities, and showering facilities where required by the standard, and appropriate accommodation for pupils' medical and therapy 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.

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

PART 6 – Provision of information

2.16 A range of information is published, provided or made available to parents, inspectors and the Department for Education. This includes 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 any with education, health and care plans or English as an additional language. It also includes particulars of the school's academic performance during the preceding school year, 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.

2.17 The standard relating to the provision of information [paragraph 32] is met.

PART 7 – Manner in which complaints are handled

2.18 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.

2.19 The standard relating to the handling of complaints [paragraph 33] is met.

PART 8 – Quality of leadership in and management of schools

2.20 The proprietor ensures 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.

2.21 The standard relating to leadership and management of the school [paragraph 34] is met.

The quality and standards of the Early Years Foundation Stage

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

- 2.22 The overall effectiveness of the early years provision is outstanding.
- 2.23 Highly qualified leaders use their experience and understanding of child development to ensure that the EYFS curriculum is carefully planned to achieve the best possible outcomes for all children, including those with SEND and additional needs. Comprehensive monitoring practices are in place to ensure that the curriculum is implemented effectively.
- 2.24 Excellent understanding of each child's level of development and rigorous care practices meet the needs of all children, ensuring they are extremely happy and safe. All children under the age of two make good or better progress relative to their starting points and are well prepared for the next stage in their education.
- 2.25 Due to the excellent levels of care that the setting provides, the personal and emotional development of the children is outstanding and children consistently demonstrate that they feel safe, secure and happy. Requirements for children's safeguarding and welfare are monitored rigorously by leaders and managers and are fully met.
- 2.26 There is secure evidence of leadership and management's strong commitment to continuous improvement through detailed, cohesive self-evaluation and a clear vision for future developments. This ensures that all children receive the best possible support and care.

Quality of education

- 2.27 The quality of education is outstanding.
- 2.28 Leaders ensure that the extremely well-planned curriculum is implemented effectively to meet each child's individual learning needs. Based on monthly themes, staff plan exciting, enriching and interesting activities, such as an activity based on a winter theme which allowed babies to use their senses to explore 'shivery ice'. Regular monitoring of the curriculum and the evaluation of the activities provided ensure that leaders are confident that learning intentions are being met for each child.
- 2.29 Staff have consistently high expectations of what every child can achieve. They have an excellent understanding of how babies and young children learn and develop. Carefully planned activities, which reflect the interest and stage of development of the child, allow them to explore, discover, and be curious. This was observed when staff challenged a baby's problem-solving skills to press the right button on a toy to activate the music. Adults demonstrated how to do it and then through gentle prompts encouraged the baby to 'have a go' and keep trying until they succeeded.
- 2.30 Staff readily engage with children during routine activities and take every opportunity to develop language and social skills. Children consistently hear and repeat words and phrases modelled and spoken to them and successfully increase their vocabulary. The setting provides rich opportunities to develop literacy skills. Children listen most attentively to stories and nursery rhymes and songs promoted by enthusiastic and highly skilled staff, babies babble and move their bodies to music, and toddlers anticipate words in favourite songs.
- 2.31 Staff make excellent use of opportunities to introduce mathematical language by counting and talking to the children about shape and size, so that even the youngest children become familiar with numbers and sequencing. Positive feedback is given to children through praise and encouragement, which helps them to acquire the skills and attitudes to learn effectively. Stimulating experiences provide children with a solid foundation on which their future learning can be built. All children, from the earliest age, are very well prepared for the next stage in their education.

Behaviour and attitudes

- 2.32 Behaviour and attitudes are outstanding.
- 2.33 Children show great enjoyment in their learning and they make excellent use of the available resources in the rooms that allow them to explore and make choices. However, there are limited opportunities for children to explore natural materials such as flowers, herbs, shells, stones and soil. There is minimal use of familiar, real, everyday items such as real cooking utensils, pans and crockery, and real vegetables and fruit. Toddlers show great fascination and intrigue as they experiment with pencils and crayons and sensory experiences such as glittery foam, while babies are keen to explore treasure baskets of sensory bottles and lights.
- 2.34 Toddlers focus on activities for appropriate periods of time for example during 'group time', enabling them to develop good habits for future learning. Babies sustain high levels of concentration when listening to familiar songs and rhymes and joining in using puppets. Children are keen to 'have a go' for themselves and will persevere until they manage to do something. For example, a toddler kept trying to make a puzzle piece fit by turning it in different ways. Babies move around the room and pull themselves up on furniture and other resources to reach objects.
- 2.35 Staff encourage children to be creative and inventive in their play so that they can develop their own ideas and choose ways to do things. For example, a toddler with a strong interest in cars was trying to load them on a car transporter, fitting in cars of different sizes into the available spaces until the transporter was loaded.
- 2.36 Children are taught to be kind and considerate and the high-quality support provided by staff encourages excellent behaviour. The setting has a highly effective partnership with parents which successfully promotes children's attendance and unexpected absences are appropriately investigated.

Personal development

- 2.37 The personal development of children is outstanding.
- 2.38 Extremely effective care practices support children's emotional security and the development of their character. Each key person's excellent knowledge of their children's unique needs ensures they respond effectively. At sleep times children were observed being comforted by staff and gently rocked or stroked to sleep, ensuring they feel emotionally safe and secure. Parents are informed of their child's daily routines through daily diaries accessed on the online system or by verbal feedback.
- 2.39 Communication between staff in the rooms is excellent and this enables all children to experience consistency in routines and high levels of care at all times. Staff share updates and relevant information and engage in professional dialogue about children's current learning, ensuring that there are continued opportunities for children to develop their interests.
- 2.40 Children are encouraged to make positive relationships and manage their own feelings. They happily engage with visitors, showing how secure they feel. Parents commented to inspectors that they are very impressed by the high standard of emotional support and care given to their child. They have great confidence in the standard of care offered at the setting. The recommendation from the previous inspection to provide children with additional opportunities to develop their social skills through 'family times' has been met.
- 2.41 Staff encourage children to take appropriate risks and to do adventurous things, such as negotiating the uneven and muddy path when walking to the woods or attempting to access the slide from the slippery metal pole steps, thereby developing their confidence. Staff help children to lead a healthy lifestyle from the very beginning of their time at the setting. They are provided with high-quality cooked food, fresh drinking water and fruit. They have regular access to the outdoor learning area and to the wider school grounds for exercise, allowing them to be physically active. Hygiene practices, which are diligently followed by everyone, ensure that the personal needs of the children at this age

are met appropriately. Staff help children to understand the need and importance of handwashing before meals and on arrival to the setting.

- 2.42 All staff give high priority to safeguarding and are aware of their responsibilities to ensure that they meet the EYFS statutory requirements for safeguarding, welfare and learning and development. Staff are highly effective in preparing children for life in modern Britain. They enable children to make decisions, such as choosing a book to read and deciding which particular activity to explore. As they encourage them to share and take turns, children learn to respect and care for one another. Children celebrate a variety of British festivals together with those from other cultures. British values of fairness, tolerance and kindness towards others underpin the setting.

Leadership and management

- 2.43 Leadership and management are outstanding.
- 2.44 The strong direction from the leadership team results in an enthusiastic and strong team of staff who share an ambitious vision to provide high quality education and exemplary levels of care. They realise this through shared values, policy and practice. They consistently monitor the standards of care and regularly scrutinise the curriculum to ensure that high standards are maintained. They have high expectations of what children under two can achieve, as well as a very clear understanding of how to support all children.
- 2.45 Staff are well qualified. Their performance is monitored carefully through annual appraisal, supported by an effective system of individual meetings which enable staff to discuss issues, including their own well-being. Staff are encouraged to follow their interests and attend a range of professional development courses to enable them to develop their skills and update their practice. This has a positive impact on their teaching of the curriculum and outcomes for children. Room leaders have opportunities to share their best practice, but opportunities to extend this to all staff are limited.
- 2.46 Parents are extremely happy with the provision. They reported that they feel very well informed about the progress their child is making, and value opportunities to contribute to their child's learning by sharing interests and achievements from home on their child's online learning journal.
- 2.47 Leaders and managers know the children very well and respond quickly to their needs, including those with SEND and additional needs. The setting can access internal specialist help when required, together with support from outside agencies through the local authority. Thorough systems are in place to ensure that every child's needs are met.
- 2.48 The needs of the setting are well-known and understood by the school governors, who are highly effective in holding leaders and managers to account for the quality of care and education. They offer support and guidance and are extremely well informed about the practice and standards of the setting. High priority is given by the staff to safeguarding and the implementation of all health and safety policies to ensure that children are kept safe. They fully comply with statutory duties for example under the Equality act 2010 and other duties in relation to the 'Prevent' strategy and safer recruitment.
- 2.49 The school's registered provision for childcare meets the requirements of the Childcare Act 2006 and no action is required.**

Recommendations for further improvement

In addition to the above action points, the school is advised to make the following improvements to its provision for children in the early years.

- Enhance the provision of natural resources and familiar everyday real objects.
- Create opportunities that enable staff to share their best practice across rooms and age groups.

3. Inspection Evidence

- 3.1 The inspectors observed lessons, conducted formal interviews with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with members of staff and with the chair of governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended form meetings. Inspectors visited the facilities for the youngest pupils, together with the learning support and educational resource areas. The responses of parents, staff and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined curriculum and other documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

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