



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

Material Change Inspection Report

Aldwickbury School

June 2023

School's details

| | | | | |
|----------------------------------|--|-----|-----------------------|----|
| School | Aldwickbury School | | | |
| DfE number | 919/6016 | | | |
| Registered charity number | 311059 | | | |
| Address | Aldwickbury School Wheathampstead Road Harpenden Hertfordshire AL5 1AD | | | |
| Telephone number | 01582 713022 | | | |
| Email address | office@aldwickbury.org.uk | | | |
| Headteacher | Mr Paul Symes | | | |
| Chair of governors | Mr Jeremy Bromfield | | | |
| Proprietor | Aldwickbury School Trust Limited | | | |
| Age range | 4 to 13 | | | |
| Number of pupils on roll | 394 | | | |
| | Day pupils | 394 | Flexi Boarders | 23 |
| | EYFS | 33 | Pre-Prep | 73 |
| | Juniors | 217 | Seniors | 71 |
| Date of inspection | 26 June 2023 | | | |

1. Introduction

Characteristics of the school

- 1.1 Aldwickbury School is an independent day and boarding school for male pupils. The school was founded in 1937, taking the name Aldwickbury when it moved to the current site in 1948. It became a charitable trust in 1969 and is administered by a board of governors who are also the trustees. The school consists of the pre-prep for pupils aged 4 to 7 years; the junior department for pupils aged 8 and 9 years; and the senior department for those aged 10 to 13 years. Flexible boarding for up to three nights per week is available from Year 5. The school has 69 pupils who require support for special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). One pupil has an education, health and care plan. English as an additional language for nine pupils. The school's previous inspection was an educational quality inspection in May 2022.

Purpose of the inspection

- 1.2 This was an announced material change inspection at the request of the Department for Education (DfE) to assess the school's proposal to increase its total pupil capacity from 380 to 450. The inspection focused on the school's compliance with the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 (ISSRs), the National Minimum Standards for Boarding 2022 and the requirements of the Early Years Statutory Framework.

| Regulations which were the focus of the inspection | Team judgements |
|--|-----------------|
| Part 3, paragraphs 7 (safeguarding) and 8 (safeguarding of boarders); NMS 8 | Met |
| Part 3, paragraph 11 (health and safety); NMS 9 | Met |
| Part 3, paragraph 12 (fire safety); NMS 10 | Met |
| Part 3, paragraph 14 (supervision of pupils); NMS 20 | Met |
| Part 3, paragraph 16 (risk assessment); NMS 9 | Met |
| Part 4, paragraphs 18 to 21 (suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors); NMS 19 | Met |
| Part 5, paragraphs 23 to 30 (premises of and accommodation at schools); NMS 4 | Met |
| Part 6, paragraph 32(1)(c) (provision of information) | Met |
| Part 8, paragraph 34 (leadership and management); NMS 2 | Met |

2. Inspection findings

Welfare, health and safety of pupils – safeguarding and safeguarding of boarders [ISSR Part 3, paragraphs 7 and 8; NMS 8]

Safeguarding policy

- 2.1 The school meets the requirements.
- 2.2 The school has an appropriate policy for safeguarding which provides suitable arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils at the school.

Safeguarding implementation

- 2.3 The school meets the standards.
- 2.4 Scrutiny of records, observation and discussions with pupils and staff indicate that appropriate safeguards are implemented effectively, including in the EYFS and boarding. Those responsible for safeguarding hold senior positions within the school. They are suitably knowledgeable and appropriately trained, including for multi-agency working. Safeguarding, pastoral, healthcare and boarding staff share key information regularly and effectively. They take into account each individual pupil's physical and psychological needs and wishes, including those with SEND. This information is used to agree appropriate action including the drawing-up and implementation of individual support plans. There is effective liaison with external agencies including referral to child and adolescent health services (CAMHS) and the local authority designated officer (LADO) for safeguarding. Training for other staff and for governors is conducted regularly as required. It is effective and includes informal updates.
- 2.5 Staff are knowledgeable about changes in recent legislation, including the management of children's mental wellbeing, contextual safeguarding, child-on-child abuse, sexual harassment and sexual violence. They understand the principles underpinning the staff code of conduct and the procedures for making a referral, including the importance of low-level reporting. They are confident about using whistleblowing procedures. Interviews with staff confirmed that training is thorough and safeguarding effectively managed. Senior leaders take appropriate action if any perceived breach of the staff code of conduct occurs or an allegation is received with regard to an adult who works with children. They understand their responsibility to make referral to relevant statutory bodies once investigations by external agencies are completed. They fulfil this effectively.
- 2.6 The governor responsible for safeguarding meets regularly with the designated safeguarding lead (DSL) and deputies. This maintains effective oversight of safeguarding policies and their implementation in the main school and the boarding houses. Reports are given regularly to the governing board by the safeguarding governor and the DSL. These highlight appropriate details of any safeguarding incidents which occur, including during trips and outside of school. This ensures that governors have an appropriate level of understanding, scrutiny and oversight. In addition to continuous monitoring, a suitable annual review of safeguarding is undertaken in line with guidance from the local authority (LA).
- 2.7 Pupils know how to contact the school's independent listeners. Any concerns raised are monitored and acted upon by the DSL. Records confirm that when pupils raise a concern they receive a timely response and action is taken where needed. Pupils who board stated confidently that they receive a detailed induction when they start school including how to stay safe and who to talk to; how to contact helplines including Childline and the Children's Commissioner; online safety; and behavioural expectations. They can name a number of staff to whom they can turn if they are worried or concerned.

- 2.8 The current arrangements are likely to meet the needs of the proposed increase in the number of pupils, including boarders and those in EYFS.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils – health and safety [ISSR Part 3, paragraph 11; NMS 9]

- 2.9 The school meets the standards.
- 2.10 The school has an appropriate policy in place for health and safety which is reviewed and updated regularly. It is implemented consistently and effectively. Senior leaders and governors monitor all aspects of health and safety regularly. Those responsible for day-to-day operations provide detailed reports including through completion of required maintenance logs and records of work carried out by internal maintenance staff and contractors. The roles and responsibilities of staff and governors for health and safety are stated clearly and there is appropriate delegation of duties and training. Maintenance staff know the site well and are aware of potential risks and hazards. Appropriate checks of school vehicles and drivers are undertaken which include the issue of annual driving permits. The school has a comprehensive asbestos management plan and appropriate measures are taken to ensure safe control and storage of hazardous substances (COSHH). Maintenance logs are used effectively by maintenance staff in order to prioritise work schedules and respond to emergencies without delay.
- 2.11 The current arrangements are likely to meet the needs of the proposed increase in the number of pupils.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils – fire safety [ISSR Part 3, paragraph 12; NMS 10]

- 2.12 The school meets the standards.
- 2.13 The school has a suitable fire risk policy which is reviewed and updated annually. The school's fire risk assessment is undertaken by a suitably qualified person. It is reviewed regularly, and any recommendations are implemented without delay. Appropriate fire procedures are in place including for boarding. Competent persons have been appointed to assist in taking preventative and protective measures including ensuring that all parts of the buildings are evacuated if there is a fire. Regular and suitable training is in place for staff and for those with responsibilities, including fire marshals.
- 2.14 Staff, pupils and visitors are provided with appropriate fire safety information including how to evacuate and where the fire assembly points are located. Regular fire drills are conducted at different times of the day and night. These are recorded accurately, including the time it takes for evacuation, any concerns, and any improvements that need to be made. Suitable emergency exits, escape routes and signage are in place, including for the new sports hall. Effective monitoring systems ensure that these are maintained consistently to the required standards. Fire equipment including extinguishers and alarms are checked regularly by external contractors. Records of all fire safety checks are maintained appropriately and monitored by governors.
- 2.15 The current arrangements are likely to meet the needs of the proposed increase in the number of pupils.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils – supervision of pupils [ISSR Part 3, paragraph 14; NMS 20]

- 2.16 The school meets the standards.

- 2.17 The school has a suitable policy for supervising pupils which is implemented effectively. Staff receive guidance during induction and ongoing revision is provided in the staff code of conduct and in regular updates. Staff have clear job descriptions detailing their duties with regard to supervision. Comprehensive duty rotas cover all areas of the school, times of day and different times of the year. They take into account the age, number and needs of pupils and the locations and activities involved. Monitoring by senior staff ensures that supervision is effective, and that cover is put in place without delay if it is required. Overnight supervision for boarders is effective. Boarders confirmed that there is always an adult to contact during the night if needed.
- 2.18 The current arrangements are likely to meet the needs of the proposed increase in the number of pupils.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils – risk assessment [ISSR Part 3, paragraph 16; NMS 9]

- 2.19 The school meets the standards.
- 2.20 There is a suitable policy and procedures with regard to risk assessment. Risk assessments are recorded electronically and monitored effectively by the health and safety committee. There are clear lines of responsibility for assessing risk. Subject leaders, including those responsible for boarding and the EYFS, oversee risk assessments effectively. Senior leaders monitor those for offsite trips. Individual care plans include the effective assessment of risk for vulnerable pupils. Risk assessments are reviewed regularly, and appropriate action taken where required to reduce risk. The school has completed an effective risk assessment to identify how the proposed increase in numbers would affect school facilities. It has put suitable procedures in place as a result which include increasing capacity in existing buildings including the new sports hall; identification of additional available capacity in boarding; and plans for the installation of temporary classrooms to house two science laboratories, an information and communications technology suite and a robotic/podcasts innovation classroom. Plans also outline the effective management of existing communal spaces, such as the dining room and hall, to cater suitably for the proposed increase in numbers.
- 2.21 The planning and procedures for offsite visits is detailed and clear with appropriate checks and approval in place. Parents are suitably informed of arrangements for school trips including behaviour expectations, safeguarding procedures, activities and travel details. Risk assessments are amended if changes occur. Any changes to arrangements are communicated to parents without delay.
- 2.22 Staff confirmed that they had received training regarding the completion of risk assessments, including those for offsite visits and residential. They are confident in completing them, including those for boarding, trips and hazardous activities.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors [ISSR Part 4, paragraphs 18–21; NMS 19]

- 2.23 The school meets the standards.
- 2.24 There is a suitable recruitment policy in place which covers the required recruitment checks and procedures, and which is implemented effectively. All staff, governors and persons engaged in regulated activity, including in boarding, are checked and recorded appropriately on the single central register of appointments (SCR). Those responsible for carrying out the required recruitment checks and the maintenance of staff records ensure that checks and evidence are in place prior to commencing work in the school. Appropriate procedures are in place for managing contractors including ensuring that they are accompanied at all times if not checked by the school. Visits to boarding areas are suitably regulated.

- 2.25 The current arrangements are likely to meet the needs of the proposed increase in the number of pupils.

Premises and accommodation – [ISSR Part 5, paragraphs 23–30; NMS 4]

- 2.26 The school meets the standards.
- 2.27 Suitable policies and procedures are in place which ensure that the school premises and accommodation and facilities are maintained to a standard where the health, safety and welfare of pupils is ensured as far as possible. There are sufficient designated toilet and changing facilities throughout the school currently. These, together with facilities installed in the proposed new buildings are sufficient to accommodate the proposed increase in pupil numbers, including for boarders and in the EYFS. Suitable disabled facilities are available for staff and visitors.
- 2.28 Suitable accommodation is provided for the medical examination and treatment of pupils and for the short-term care of sick or injured pupils both in boarding houses and in the school's suitably equipped health centre. The accommodation includes toilets and bathroom facilities and is adequately staffed. The school site is suitably secure. All visitors are required to sign into the main office and are accompanied at all times. Use of surveillance equipment does not intrude upon boarders' privacy. Acoustics and water supply are appropriate throughout the school. Lighting to the footpaths has recently been increased or renovated effectively. There is sufficient space for outdoor play. Accommodation for boarders is appropriate. It is not projected that boarding numbers will increase substantially.
- 2.29 The current arrangements are likely to meet the needs of the proposed increase in the number of pupils.

Provision of information [ISSR Part 6, paragraph 32(1)(c)]

- 2.30 The school meets the requirements for providing information relating to safeguarding to parents. Particulars of the arrangements for safeguarding are published on the school's website.

Quality of leadership and management [ISSR Part 8, paragraph 34; NMS 2]

- 2.31 The school meets the standards.
- 2.32 Senior leaders and governors, including those with specific responsibilities for safeguarding, boarding and the EYFS, demonstrate good skills and knowledge and fulfil their responsibilities effectively, so that all the other standards are consistently met, and they actively promote the wellbeing of the pupils. Measures planned or implemented for the proposed increase in pupil numbers are likely to ensure pupils' continued wellbeing.

3. Recommendation with regard to material change inspection

Recommendation

3.1 It is recommended that the request to increase capacity from 380 to 450 is granted.

4. Summary of evidence

- 4.1 The inspector held discussions with the head, senior leaders and other members of staff and met with the chair of governors. He visited different areas of the school, observed lessons and talked with groups of pupils. He scrutinised a range of documentation, records and policies.

Inspectors

Mr Desmond Dunne

Reporting inspector