

Akeley Wood Senior School

Independent School

Inspection report

DCSF Registration Number	825/6015
Unique Reference Number	110536
Inspection number	333820
Inspection dates	17–18 June 2009
Reporting inspector	Angela Corbett HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended.

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Information about the school

Akeley Wood Senior School has been situated on its extensive rural site on the Northamptonshire/Buckinghamshire border since 1946, although it can trace its history on previous sites for over one hundred years. The senior school in its current format has been established since 1987 with junior and lower schools located on two other sites some little distance away. There are currently 557 boys and girls attending, between the ages of 11 and 18. The school is undergoing re-organisation from three into two schools with the senior school based across two of the buildings from September 2009 and a junior school on the third. There are no pupils with statements of special educational needs but a small minority are provided with help for specific learning difficulties, in particular dyslexia. Very few are learning English as an additional language. The school runs a small after-school care facility.

The school aims that pupils should develop their individual talents and personal qualities in whatever direction they may lie, placing a particular emphasis on high academic achievement as well as encouraging excellence in the arts and sport. Whilst also fostering a belief in themselves and a caring attitude in an atmosphere that is happy and without pretension.

The whole school was inspected by the Independent Schools Inspectorate in April 2006. This is the first published report by Ofsted on the school's provision for pupils between the ages of 11-18.

Evaluation of the school

Akeley Wood Senior School provides an outstanding quality of education for its pupils and very successfully meets its stated aims. Pupils say they find the school welcoming, calm and friendly. Teaching and assessment are outstanding overall. The curriculum has been exceptionally well developed to meet pupils' academic and personal needs and interests. Consequently, pupils make consistently outstanding progress in relation to their varied starting points and develop into mature, articulate and confident young people. Increasingly pupils are joining the school's rapidly improving sixth form. Here they make good progress overall. The provision for students' spiritual, moral, cultural and social development is outstanding and their behaviour is excellent. Staff know the pupils very well and they receive excellent personal care and attention on a daily basis.

Provision for welfare, health and safety is outstanding because of the excellent attention to all aspects of pupils' health and safety. The school complies with all the regulations for independent schools.

Quality of education

Akeley Wood Senior School provides an outstanding curriculum for its pupils. Pupils study a full curriculum in Years 7 to 9 including at least one of three modern languages and textile studies. In addition, pupils take the Royal College of Music theory exam in Year 7 and the half-course GCSE qualification in Religious Education at the end of Year 9. In Years 10 and 11, pupils typically study nine subjects, including compulsory English, mathematics and science. They select mainly from subjects previously studied although single sciences, textiles and both business and sports studies are additional options. A small minority of pupils have specific learning needs, in particular dyslexia. They receive excellent support and consequently make good progress. The Tutorial Programme is designed for small groups of less able pupils in each year group. The curriculum is extremely well adapted to enable most of them to achieve exceptionally well at GCSE and gain Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) and information and communication technology (ICT) accreditation.

In the sixth form the curriculum is exceptionally well developed to meet learners' diverse needs and interests. All GCSE subjects are available at AS and A2 levels as well as psychology, photography and music technology. There are areas of good practice in cross-curricular literacy and numeracy but inconsistent whole-school policy and practice. Literacy support for pupils with English as an additional language is a strong feature. However, pupils say that there are too few opportunities to use ICT in learning other subjects, because of insufficient access to computers. Inspection evidence would support this view. There is a good range of extra-curricular activities which includes support for pupils in preparing for examinations as well as sport, music and drama. From Year 9, the majority of pupils participate in the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme and most sixth formers achieve at least the bronze level award. Pupils take part in a wide range of visits and trips and receive many visitors, all of which enhances the breadth of their experiences.

Good personal, social, health and careers education is provided through the daily tutorial time, the form period, assemblies, citizenship education. It is further supported by elements within the whole curriculum. The school offers individual music tuition across a wide range of instruments and pupils learn about national institutions, such as the Promenade Concerts. Although there is no work experience programme, pupils develop good workplace skills through team-work activities. They receive particularly good support from the Connexions careers adviser.

The school has focused very successfully on improving the quality of teaching in recent years so that the quality of teaching and assessment is outstanding overall.

Teachers have excellent subject knowledge which is enhanced by their thorough understanding of the examinations requirements for each grade level. This inspires confidence in pupils and ensures they are highly prepared for each examination. The learning aims of lessons are made clear to all pupils. Teaching is usually well paced with a good range of activities to motivate pupils and promote independent learning. They have strong trust in their teachers to support and guide them and excellent attitudes to learning. They work enthusiastically in most lessons, particularly when learning is made fun and exciting, enabling them to develop a love of the subject. Some exemplary practice was seen during the inspection

Pupils' books are presented to a good standard. In almost all lessons pupils receive both good verbal and written feedback which provides them with clear ways on how to improve. However, in a small minority of lessons marking is less detailed, although pupils said they knew how to improve or where to go for help. The school makes excellent use of the data collected on individual pupils' progress and effort in their different subjects, in the three-weekly assessment cycle, to ensure that pupils keep on track in terms of meeting or exceeding their targets.

By the end of Year 11 pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, make outstanding progress from their varied starting points as shown by their excellent GCSE results. In the sixth form, pupils make consistently good and for some exceptional progress. Pupils are well-prepared for leaving and most progress successfully to courses of further study.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The support for pupils' personal development is outstanding, and their development is outstanding as a result. Pupils are polite, mature, and confident. They are able to express their views eloquently. Their social competence is shown through their good relationships with each other both in and out of lessons and in their awareness of the needs of others. They manage and organise events to raise substantial funds for a range of charities both at home and abroad. For example, they recently raised funds for the British Diabetic Society in response to the presence of a pupil at the school with diabetes. Pupils are encouraged, particularly through the Duke of Edinburgh Award programme, to be involved in community work close to their homes. Pupils have excellent opportunities to develop spiritually by reflecting on key issues and the world around them in lessons, assemblies and form time. Their cultural understanding and knowledge of British institutions and current affairs is developed well through the very well integrated personal, social and health education programme, through the contributions of visitors to the school and through a variety of visits. Music and art are strengths of the school and particularly enhance pupils' spiritual and cultural development. Pupils develop a love for music and they participate with enthusiasm in the many bands and choirs and drama productions. They regularly perform in assemblies and at concerts both in and out of school. At the time of the inspection pupils were organising their annual 'Woodstock' festival, a large-scale annual celebration of the school's music.

A few parents raised concerns about behaviour in their pre-inspection questionnaires. However, in the view of the inspection team, pupils' behaviour is outstanding both in lessons and around the school. There is a student council and there has been some impact of their work, for example the provision of new benches for socialising at break and lunchtimes. However, the work of the council is not sufficiently promoted and their views actively sought or acted on.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety is outstanding. Staff know their pupils very well. Much emphasis is placed on providing highly effective pastoral support and guidance by form tutors, heads of year, senior staff and the school's Connexions adviser. As a result, pupils say that they feel safe in school and know that they can turn to a member of staff with whom they can share concerns. They speak highly of the support they receive. Pupils are encouraged to live healthy lifestyles with excellent opportunities to participate in sport or Duke of Edinburgh expeditions. They appreciate the healthy options available at lunchtimes, particularly the fresh fruit. All staff have received recent training for child protection and those responsible for first aid have also attended relevant training courses. Excellent attention is given to pupils' health and safety. Parents expressed their confidence in the school in ensuring the health and safety of their children. Risk assessments are undertaken and pupils observed in ICT and science lessons demonstrated their good understanding in relation to health and safety when using equipment. Risk assessments for the numerous trips and visits are carefully carried out. The admission and attendance registers comply with regulations. The school has a plan to improve access for disabled users which complies with the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 2002. The plan relates well to the aims of the school and considers the implications of modifying a listed building as well as considering the wider aspects of accessibility.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school's procedures for the recruitment and appointment of staff fully meet the requirements. All staff have been subject to clearance at an enhanced level with the Criminal Records Bureau to ensure that they are suitable to work with children. The single central record of staff checks is exemplary.

School's premises and accommodation

The school premises are situated in very pleasant rural surroundings. The main building is listed. Classrooms are situated in the converted stable buildings, in a new science block and in a large number of temporary classrooms. A new sports dome is near completion and there are plans for a new teaching block to be built. Maximum use is made of the school's facilities and there are appropriate arrangements in place for the emergency evacuation of all parts of the school.

The school is maintained in good order. The sports facilities include an astro-turf pitch and there are ample outside areas for play and socialising.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school provides a wide range of information for parents through the prospectus and leaflets as well as a welcome booklet. The website also provides good information for both prospective and current parents. Parents receive weekly newsletters electronically. In addition, there is a highly informative termly newsletter which includes information about recent trips and visits as well as celebrating the pupils' successes and giving information about forthcoming events. Parents find out about their children's progress through the three-weekly grade sheet and termly written reports. They also have the opportunity to talk to the staff about their children's progress during the school year.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school's complaints policy fully meets requirements. Parents comment favourably about the school's response to any issues raised.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended ('the Regulations').

What the school could do to improve further

While not required by regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development:

- develop a consistent policy and practice for literacy and numeracy across the curriculum
- improve pupils' access to computers
- develop the role of the school council so that more account is taken of pupils' views.

Inspection Judgement Recording Form

outstanding	good	satisfactory	inadequate
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The quality of education

Overall quality of education	✓			
How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of pupils	✓			
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of pupils' needs	✓			
How well pupils make progress in their learning	✓			

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	✓			
The behaviour of pupils	✓			

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils	✓			
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School details

Name of school	Akeley Wood Senior School
DCSF number	825/6015
Unique reference number	110536
Type of school	Secondary day school
Status	Independent
Date school opened	1946
Age range of pupils	11-18 years
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	Boys: 326 Girls: 231 Total: 557
Annual fees (day pupils)	£10, 575
Address of school	Akeley Wood Buckingham Buckinghamshire MK18 5AE
Telephone number	01280 814110
Fax number	01280 822945
Email address	headmaster@akeleywoods senior.co.uk
Headteacher	Dr Jeremy Grundy
Proprietor	Cognita
Reporting inspector	Angela Corbett HMI
Dates of inspection	17–18 June 2009