

# INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

## INSPECTION REPORT ON

### **Aldenham School**

The preparatory school was inspected at the same time and a separate report published.

Full Name of the School	<b>Aldenham School</b>
DCSF Number	<b>919/6003</b>
Registered Charity Number	<b>298140</b>
Address	<b>Elstree, Hertfordshire WD6 3AJ.</b>
Telephone Number	<b>01923 858122</b>
Fax Number	<b>01923 854410</b>
Email Address	<b>enquiries@aldenham.com</b>
Headmaster	<b>Mr James Fowler</b>
Chairman of Governors	<b>Mr Stuart Lewis</b>
Age Range	<b>11 to 18</b>
Gender	<b>Mixed</b>
Inspection Dates	<b>24<sup>th</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> November 2008</b>

This inspection report follows the framework laid down by the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI). The inspection was carried out under the arrangements of the Independent Schools Council (ISC) Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership. It was also carried out under Section 162A(1)(b) of the Education Act 2002 as amended by the Education Act 2005, under the provisions of which the Secretary of State for Education and Skills accredited ISI as the body approved for the purpose of inspecting schools belonging to ISC Associations and reporting on compliance with the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended with effect from January 2005 and May 2007.

The inspection was not carried out in conjunction with Ofsted, Children's Directorate, and the report does not contain specific judgements on the National Minimum Boarding Standards. It comments on the progress made by the school in meeting the recommendations set out in the most recent statutory boarding inspection and evaluates the quality of the boarding experience and its contribution to pupils' education and development in general. The full Ofsted report can be found at [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk) under Inspection reports/Boarding schools.

The inspection does not examine the financial viability of the school or investigate its accounting procedures. The inspectors check the school's health and safety procedures and comment on any significant hazards they encounter: they do not carry out an exhaustive health and safety examination. Their inspection of the premises is from an educational perspective and does not include in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### Characteristics of the School

- 1.1 Aldenham School is a day and boarding school for boys and girls between the ages of eleven and eighteen. It occupies a rural site of 120 acres a few miles north of London where it was founded in 1597 by Richard Platt, Master of the Brewers' Company. The company is still actively involved in the school's management and development. The school aims to develop all the talents of each pupil and believes that being a smaller school with a very strong boarding ethos contributes to this development.
- 1.2 Aldenham Preparatory School is on the same site and both schools are overseen by one board of governors. The preparatory school shares many of the facilities at the senior school, including the dining hall and the theatre, as well as the sports pitches and sports centre.
- 1.3 The number of pupils has increased significantly since the last ISI inspection in October 2002 from 457 to 545 in 2008, of whom 443 are boys and 102 girls. Years 7 to 11 have 381 pupils and 164 are in the sixth form. One hundred and twenty-eight pupils are boarders. The school has welcomed girls into the sixth form since 1980 and, in September 2004, girls were recruited at eleven plus, making the school now co-educational throughout. A third of pupils are in receipt of bursary or scholarship funding, the majority of which is from the school's own resources. The school has five boarding-and-day houses and two day houses. Pupils mainly come from the surrounding area, many using the school transport, and some pupils' families are based overseas. Pupils are from a wide range of family backgrounds, but mainly from the professions or business. A range of ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds is represented. The current headmaster was appointed in September 2006.
- 1.4 Since the last inspection the school has added a new classroom block for English and modern foreign languages, re-furnished the theatre and the boarding and day houses and upgraded its information and communication technology (ICT) provision. The preparatory school for boys and girls was established in September 2003.
- 1.5 The main entry ages for the school are eleven, thirteen and sixteen. At eleven and thirteen, all prospective pupils are interviewed and are required to take an entrance examination in English, mathematics and verbal reasoning. At thirteen additional subjects for the entrance examination are French and science. A report is also required from the feeder school of each applicant. At age sixteen, entry depends on GCSE results, an interview and a report from the current school.
- 1.6 Standardised tests in recent years indicate that the average ability of the pupils on entering the school at the age of eleven and thirteen is above the national average. If pupils are performing in line with their abilities, their results in public examinations would be above the average for all maintained schools. The average ability of the pupils on entering Year 12 is below the national average for all sixth form students, but a number of these pupils are of above average ability. If sixth form students were to achieve in line with their abilities, they would obtain results below the national average for all maintained schools.
- 1.7 Two pupils have statements of special educational needs, and the school has identified 143 pupils in need of learning support for learning difficulties or other problems which include dyslexia, dyspraxia and problems of retention and planning. Most pupils are proficient in English. Pupils are recruited from the school's own preparatory school, other preparatory schools or maintained junior schools. Three-quarters of pupils in Year 11 stay for the sixth form. On leaving the upper sixth, the vast majority proceed to university or higher education.

- 1.8 The school's educational ethos is exemplified in its prospectus statement that 'only one of the runners can come first, so it's good to remember that schools are not racetracks'. Its aim of developing the talents of each pupil is based on setting appropriate goals to challenge each pupil and also emphasising the importance of the social, moral and spiritual dimensions of community life in modern society. The school believes in recognising and rewarding personal and collective achievement and nurturing in pupils the character and skills with which to meet the challenges beyond school.
- 1.9 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school; at times, the terms 'lower sixth' and 'upper sixth' are used to refer to Years 12 and 13.

## 2. THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION

### The Educational Experience Provided

- 2.1 Aldenham gives its pupils a very effective educational experience at each phase of their school life. Pupils enjoy a comprehensive range of educational opportunities to develop their intellectual, physical and cultural talents. The school offers an education programme that allows pupils to study a broad range of subjects, enriched by a full and wide-ranging choice of other activities, that develop in the young people the character and skills for adult life. The school is making significant progress towards its aims to set appropriate goals to challenge each individual pupil and to recognise and reward pupils' personal and collective achievement. In positive response to the recommendations of the 2002 inspection report, the school has invested in ICT resources and training, and improved the library's resources and atmosphere. This facility at the heart of the school is now a stimulating environment for independent learning, research and private study.
- 2.2 The school is successful in promoting linguistic, mathematical, scientific, human and social, aesthetic and creative development and in the acquisition of skills of speaking, listening, literacy and numeracy. In Years 7 and 8 a wide range of subjects is available, including the three separate sciences and French and Latin, complemented in Year 9 by a second foreign language, either Spanish or German. At GCSE, pupils take up to ten subjects including a core of English, English literature, mathematics and dual or triple science. In addition short courses are taken in ICT and religious studies. At AS level pupils choose four subjects from an extensive range with the majority following three subjects to A level.
- 2.3 All pupils benefit from an excellent 'life skills' programme that is integrated and co-ordinated across all age groups. The programme is principally delivered in house tutorial time either by the individual tutors or through team teaching. In one such session groups of pupils from each of Years 11, 12 and 13 made high quality data presentations on democracy and were judged by their peers against set criteria. The programme is enhanced by longer off-timetable sessions led by external professionals on topics including relationships for Year 7, study skills for Year 11 and drink driving issues for the lower sixth. The parental survey affirmed unanimous support for the curriculum opportunities offered.
- 2.4 The extra-curricular opportunities strongly enhance pupils' development. A pupil remarked "the opportunities in this school are amazing", a justifiable view shared by the parents. Pupils contribute to the editing of the school magazine, *The Aldenhamian*, and engage in debates and a creative writing club. A wide diversity of sports is offered including options such as fives, sailing, golf and swimming that complement the principal sports of football, cricket, hockey and netball. A full fixture list allows pupils to experience competition and teams achieve commendable success. Music and drama activities are equally popular. In the final rehearsals of the production of *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, pupils showed mature, sensitive and powerful acting in preparation for the opening night. In music pupils perform well, as was observed in the rehearsal for the annual carol service. The Combined Cadet Force (CCF) has been re-introduced in recent years and is growing in popularity. The house system, a major strength of the school, provides another layer of activity: the inter-house competitions. Pupils of all ages involve themselves enthusiastically, striving earnestly to ensure their house wins the coveted shield.
- 2.5 The educational experience and personal development are further enhanced by links with the wider community. During a recent charity day, under the direction of the pupils' charity committees, monies were raised to support a school in Africa. Many other challenging and

beneficial educational trips take place including an expedition to India and sports tours to the West Indies and Spain. Pupils participate in a number of community service schemes.

- 2.6 Pupils and parents are very well satisfied with the help and guidance pupils receive when planning for the next stage of education, training or employment and for adult life. Preparatory school pupils in Year 6 are prepared for senior school life by a carefully tailored induction programme based in Martineau's (the junior house). Pupils much appreciate the advice offered to them by the careers department and other teachers on subject choices, university courses and potential professions. Year 12 pupils benefit from a carefully organized and individually planned work experience programme, which is a model of good practice.
- 2.7 The curriculum is planned effectively and is regularly reviewed to provide equality of access for all pupils. A very detailed review was commissioned by the headmaster on his appointment and an excellent curriculum document was approved for implementation from the start of the last academic year. This included a move to a new timetable for the school day which has been well received by staff, pupils and parents. A number of initiatives are not yet fully embedded, most significantly the aim to challenge the more able. Many departments are making excellent use of ICT but, in a few, there is limited and ineffective use. Curricular links with the preparatory school have been well developed including liaison in core subjects, preparatory pupils having taster experiences in the senior school and some senior school staff teaching in the preparatory school.
- 2.8 Those identified as having learning difficulties or disabilities (LDD) are given appropriate support. Recently, the school responded promptly to the concerns of parents over the management of the department and the programme of support is now effective. The needs of the two pupils with statements are fully met and reports sent to the local authority. The support for those with English as an additional language (EAL) is comprehensive.
- 2.9 The gifted and talented policy has not as yet been fully implemented. There are some good opportunities including sports academies for football and cricket, *Les Philosophes* society for the most able sixth formers, and senior mathematical challenges, but in many subject areas no effective programme is in place.
- 2.10 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the curriculum [Standard 1].

### **Pupils' Learning and Achievements**

- 2.11 Pupils learning and achievements are good. Pupils gain wide knowledge, skills and understanding of the subjects and activities provided. In the course of their education they develop these effectively to provide the essential skills and attitudes for work and study. The school's aim to recognise and reward personal and collective achievement in a positive learning environment is well met. At the last inspection learning was described as good and academic achievement has further improved since then.
- 2.12 Pupils learn to think critically. In a Year 7 art lesson, pupils made positive and admiring comments on each other's work. The high standard of artwork everywhere in the school enhances the learning environment. Pupils also exemplified their creative skills in a Year 10 design and technology lesson on designing ice scrapers.

- 2.13 Pupils speak and listen well. Many articulate discussions were noted with pupils using sophisticated vocabulary and a high degree of thoughtfulness as in a Year 7 religious studies lesson on the crucifixion and resurrection. Pupils acquire good reading skills, both in understanding a text and reading aloud and in private. Pupils studying Wilfred Owen's *Strange Meeting* demonstrated a developing understanding of the linguistic features of the poetry. In library lessons pupils enthused about their personal reading and in chapel the reading of the lesson was expressive and clear. Pupils have developed their writing skills to such an extent that, in a Spanish class, pupils worked together to write a script to convey the emotions of characters in a silent film.
- 2.14 Pupils' knowledge and skills in mathematics are also well developed. Lower ability pupils showed good arithmetical knowledge and pupils readily apply their numeracy skills in other subjects, such as in geography, where the study of rivers involved strong mapping and graphing skills. Pupils have a wide range of ICT skills. They use laptops naturally in class for word processing and data handling, undertake independent research on the internet and access the school's web portal for teaching notes and homework assignments. Pupils also reason well as observed in a Year 11 physics class where pupils explained the effect of prisms on light. They are also more than capable of independent thought.
- 2.15 No significant differences were observed in relative attainment between groups of pupils. EAL pupils and those with learning needs are well known by staff and, in the main, are supported well but unobtrusively in lessons. However, more able pupils do not often reach their full potential, because they are frequently not extended beyond simple routine tasks which they accomplish quickly.
- 2.16 Pupils achieve well in public examinations. Pupils' attainment in GCSE is good in relation to their abilities. Results in GCSE over the last three years for which comparative data are available have been well above the national average for all maintained schools. A number of subjects have consistently shown very good results, reflected in the high proportion of A/A\* grades achieved. Nationally standardised measures show that progress from Year 7 to GCSE is above national norms. Students' attainment in A level is good in relation to their abilities. Results in A level over the last three years have been in line with the national average for all maintained schools.
- 2.17 Significant achievements are made by individuals and teams. Pupils reach high levels in the Combined Cadet Force (CCF) and the Duke of Edinburgh's (DoE) award. Achievements in extra-curricular drama and performance arts are strong. In music, particularly in the annual house music competition, pupils gain much enjoyment from reaching a level of performance beyond their expectation. In a wide range of team sports pupils perform well against challenging opposition. In athletics, the traditional run from Eros (Piccadilly) to Eros (Aldenham) gives a unique challenge. School coaching supports pupils' individual achievement. One pupil plays hockey for the Welsh national team and the golf team are national trophy winners. Pupils perform well in the annual Mathematics Challenge and enterprising Year 10 pupils, under the mentorship of a sixth former, performed creditably in a business competition, one team reaching the regional final.
- 2.18 The school takes the recognition of achievement seriously and pupils value the school's systems of rewards and sanctions. 'Blues' and especially 'golds' are part of everyday parlance. However, with due reverence, a sixth former told an inspector that it was the colours tie which was "the coolest thing to win".

- 2.19 Pupils' attitude to work is positive. Throughout the age range, pupils take a great deal of pride in the appearance of their work. Pupils' ability to work in groups and teams is outstanding. In the classroom they help each other, and are equally comfortable in asking for help. Outside the classroom, pupils' ability to self-evaluate and support each other in drama productions was manifest. The many sports which the school offers promote good teamwork. The spirit of encouragement, which they give each other on the football field, was very evident across the age and ability range. Pupils' behaviour in class is exemplary and they readily settle to learning. They enjoy discussion and rise to academic challenges as in a classical civilisation discussion of the use by Tacitus of emotional language.
- 2.20 Pupils show perseverance and purpose in their learning and, on occasions, genuine excitement, becoming animated in their learning where there is a variety of activities, imaginative tasks or at the prospect of competition, such as in a team match in a business studies lesson. A pupil enthused that "top set mathematics is like a brain work-out". However, on the few occasions where teaching was observed to be dull and routine, pupils resort to becoming passive as learners, happy to be spoon-fed in examination practice and technique.

### **Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development of Pupils**

- 2.21 The last inspection described the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development as good and the school has developed this aspect of pupils' education to the point where it is now outstanding. This is central to meeting the aim of the school to emphasise the importance of the social, moral and spiritual dimensions of community life in a modern society, reflected in the school's special atmosphere as a multicultural community with a Christian ethos.
- 2.22 The pupils have outstanding spiritual awareness. The school treasures its tradition of Christian values and places spiritual development at the centre of pupils' experience. The pupils confirmed the positive influence of the chapel that is used for chapel services, assemblies and musical performances. The spiritual dimension is emphasised by the chapel's symbols and decoration. Chapel services, which are topical and challenging, provide good opportunities for pupils to reflect on matters of faith. Pupils and staff value the pause offered in the busy life of the school by the voluntary Eucharist. Pupils appreciate the fact that the religious services are inclusive of other faiths and that this helps them develop a greater understanding of other beliefs. Pupils enjoy a weekly 'chapel chill out' where they can socialise in the chapel, developing an understanding of how to "care for souls and each other". The very supportive atmosphere and the constant encouragement and praise the pupils receive help them develop self-esteem and self-confidence. Pupils also develop their spiritual understanding in activities where they engage with the natural elements. In sailing, for example, in testing conditions pupils learn about themselves and their skills by harnessing natural forces. Pupils enjoy aesthetic and creative experiences in art, music and drama. They comment on the inspiration of being surrounded by displays of fellow pupils' art and how this makes them question the more intangible issues of life.
- 2.23 The pupils develop a strong awareness of moral issues and demonstrate a growing understanding of the difference between right and wrong and respect for the law. The 'life skills' programme plays a major role in this area, but it is not the only source of moral education. During a chapel assembly six senior girls, having conducted a survey on friendships and relationships, presented their findings to the whole school community. These findings were both challenging and explicit and the maturity and courage of the girls' presentation added much to the message about morality in relationships. In a religious studies (RS) lesson the problem of evil was deeply debated. The pupils' awareness of

environmental issues was evident in lessons and the wider life of the school. Younger pupils model senior pupils' and teachers' respectful attitude towards all members of the community and the rapport between pupils and staff is excellent. The fact that each tutor delivers the 'life skills' programme signals to pupils that the moral dimension is not limited to one subject but permeates school life. Pupils discuss subjects such as human rights, displaying a good knowledge of topical issues, including state regulation and the individual's right to privacy. Moral issues of particular relevance to adolescents are often handled in group sessions, external speakers providing challenge and opportunity for discussion.

- 2.24 Pupils have outstanding social development which derives from the ethos of respect and value for individuals promoted by the school. Two-thirds of pupils in Year 13 have school responsibilities, which leads them to a better understanding of the challenges of leadership and setting an example. Pupils become resilient and resourceful through the challenge of outdoor activities. The members of the school council, the chapel committee and the charity committee meet regularly, gaining experience of working responsibly for the common good. The school's annual sixth form dinner is an opportunity for sixth formers to mix socially in a more formal setting and develop social and conversational skills, as is the annual Beer Money ceremony at the Brewers' Hall. Members of staff provide excellent role models for pupils in the quality of the relationships that they foster and by the way that they work well together. Pupils' understanding of public institutions and services in England is developed by the 'life skills' programme. The concept of democracy triggered a lively debate amongst sixth formers, while Year 10 pupils questioned the role of the Green Party in British politics. The school places much emphasis on the needs of others. Older pupils give blood on a regular basis; on Saturdays Year 13 pupils run the local junior school project. Charity work is widespread, including Christmas boxes, support for a cancer charity and food for families in inner cities. Parents who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire said how confident they were that the school promoted good attitudes and behaviour. The courtesy shown by all members of the Aldenham community towards each other and to visitors is remarkable. Rules are respected and pupils support each other as a matter of course, both within lessons and around the school.
- 2.25 Pupils have an excellent understanding and appreciation of their own and other cultures. The school is a multi-cultural community where respect and tolerance for the traditions and beliefs of others are high. The boarding houses enhance cultural awareness by welcoming overseas pupils who share their own traditions and values. Overseas pupils commented on the friendliness of their reception, and, within classes, discussion of literature or social issues reinforces the common values of different cultures. Year 11 pupils freely expressed that they belong to a community where everybody is equal, describing the school as a big friendly group where each race and religion is respected and celebrated and pupils can attend their respective religious festivals. Pupils' experience of different diets is enhanced by the catering company's provision of French, Italian and Spanish days. Different cultures are explored in pupils' discussions, such as in an RS lesson, where a pupil's presentation of the thought for the day on the festival of Diwali and the notion of light was taken up by the class as they discussed the concept of pilgrimage. Pupils gain cultural awareness from their expeditions, such as the one to Berlin which developed their understanding of the communist world. The annual exchange with a Polish school, including visiting the Jewish ghetto and holocaust memorial in Lodz, brings pupils face to face with the realities of cultural engineering. Visits to London galleries, museums and theatres further develop pupils' cultural appreciation.
- 2.26 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils [Standard 2].

## **The Quality of Teaching (Including Assessment)**

- 2.27 The quality of teaching is good and meets the aim of the school to provide pupils with the essential skills that they will need in the world in which they will grow up. At times the teaching was outstanding and it was never less than satisfactory. In the 2002 report teaching was judged as good and, since then, the school has developed the quality of its teaching in a number of areas, particularly in response to the recommendation in the last report to increase the opportunities for pupils and staff to use ICT within their academic subjects. The teaching enables pupils to make good progress and the results at both GCSE and A level confirm that most pupils are given the necessary support to increase their academic potential. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities (LDD) and those for whom English is an additional language are well supported in most lessons, but, in a few lessons, this was not the case. Equally, those particularly gifted pupils did not receive specific support and the school is aware that the gifted and talented programme is not yet fully implemented.
- 2.28 In a number of subjects pupils are helped to develop their intellectual and creative talents and the ability to think and learn for themselves, and this was seen at its best where the teaching was stimulating, gave pupils the opportunity for expressing their views and used ICT to offer pupils new ways of thinking about a topic. In such lessons, the teaching was always well planned and encouraged the pupils to be disciplined about the management of their written material, which, in turn, gave pupils confidence and aided their progress. This strength of teaching was observed in a dynamic Year 7 biology class, where pupils' evaluative and investigative skills of plant anatomy and physiology were enhanced. It was also in evidence in a Year 13 English class, where the teaching of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* inspired pupils to relate skilfully to the social and political context and to challenge ideas.
- 2.29 Teachers know their subjects well and impart subject knowledge with enthusiasm, which engenders real interest and enjoyment amongst the pupils. Pupils respect their teachers and the management of behaviour is good. Many teachers also take into account in their teaching the particular aptitudes and needs of individual pupils, pitching their teaching at the correct level in relation to pupils' current attainment in the subject. In drama classes the subtle but clear support of pupils with learning needs was notable. The school evaluates pupils' academic performance against national standards and makes these statistics available to teachers, but this information was not used by all teachers to support pupils' progress.
- 2.30 Teachers have available to them a wide range of resources. Where, in the main, these are used to the full, pupils are stimulated by their own use of ICT, for example, by tackling problems on interactive whiteboards. Equally, some teachers make learning a real pleasure and challenge by using ICT to show film, produce examples from newspapers and display clips from the internet, as in a history lesson on racial prejudice in the deep south of the USA. This stimulates good, and, at times, outstanding pupil responses, and it leads to animated discussion and a clear sense of the pupils developing their understanding of a topic. It was notable that, even in those lessons where ICT played a strong supporting role, teachers insisted that pupils wrote notes as a result of what they had seen and heard. In these cases, the notes involved pupils in drawing conclusions and making connections, rather than simply stating facts. The school portal is used by some teachers to give pupils lesson notes and, where this has been well developed, it obviates the need to give notes in class. Pupils who use this system said how supportive it was of their learning and revision for tests and examinations.

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- 2.31 Teachers give a significant amount of their time outside the classroom in the support of individual pupils to help them with areas of their work they are finding difficult. Pupils report how much they value this support. However, this individual support does not extend to the more able pupils to aid them in reaching even higher academic levels.
- 2.32 Assessment of pupils' work is uneven. At best, assessment is regular, detailed and offers advice for improvement. Some departments follow their own marking scheme diligently and pupils are helped to understand the scheme so that they are aware what a mark means in terms of their progress. Pupils also report how valuable they find the individual sessions in class with subject teachers, where the quality of their written work is discussed and advice given for improvement. Where this is not the case, marking is perfunctory and, at times, non-existent.
- 2.33 The quality of the teaching does, in the main, meet the school's aim of providing the skills needed in adult life but the teaching does not fully support those particularly gifted and talented pupils.
- 2.34 The school meets the regulatory requirements for teaching [Standard 1].

### **3. THE QUALITY OF CARE AND RELATIONSHIPS**

#### **The Quality of Pastoral Care, and the Welfare, Health and Safety of Pupils**

- 3.1 The quality of pastoral care and pupils' welfare is outstanding, successfully meeting the school's aims to nurture in pupils the character and skills with which to meet the challenges of life beyond school and within a small, caring community. The fostering of nurture prized by Aldenham's founder is clearly evident. The high quality of pastoral care noted in the previous inspection remains a strength of the school; a view endorsed strongly by both pupils and parents. The words "bonds", "community" and "friends" were frequently on the lips of pupils, who clearly appreciate the welcoming, supportive ethos of the school.
- 3.2 Staff support and guidance for pupils is excellent, reinforced by a strong and influential house structure which promotes genuine house spirit and a sense of belonging. The housemasters and the housemistress are supported by a team of dedicated tutors who are responsible for a group of a dozen tutees whom they meet regularly in registration and in timetabled 'life skills' sessions. In one such period Year 7 and 8 tutors painstakingly went through homework diaries, identifying areas of strengths and weaknesses in organisation, checking for rewards and parents' comments and setting targets for the next period. In the senior houses, this process is more informal. However, pupils interviewed pay testimony to the effectiveness of the guidance they receive. Careers advice is very thorough and strongly appreciated. There is sufficient tutor support in houses so that a housemaster or housemistress can take an overview of pupils' needs and follow up concerns whilst the tutors are taking care of the remainder of the group.
- 3.3 The strengthening of the tutorial system through a recent re-structuring has brought great benefits to the care and guidance given to pupils. A careful consideration of girls' different needs, through the creation of a separate girls' house, has had a positive impact on their welfare and is greatly appreciated by them. Spacious house facilities for all pupils contribute strongly to both house identity and pastoral care. Year group common rooms with comfortable décor allow for informal engagement between staff and pupils. The provision of tutors' studies encourages staff to spend time in the houses and enables both unobtrusive supervision and an open-door approach.
- 3.4 The school is fully aware that pupils need a range of support in addition to teachers, tutors and boarding staff and provides an independent counsellor, supported by staff in the medical centre. Some Year 13 students are trained as peer group listeners, and pupils at interview were appreciative of this initiative, saying: "there is always someone to talk to even if you do not want to see a teacher".
- 3.5 The quality of relationships between staff and pupils is outstanding. Pupils interviewed commented that teachers were always willing to answer questions or direct them to someone who could. The rapport between teachers and pupils is clearly evident in the classroom, in activities and in chance encounters between lessons. One pupil referred to staff and pupils as a "big friendly group" and some boarders spoke of their matron as "mother". Whilst some pupils in the questionnaire felt that their views were not heard, school council meetings, regular house meetings and the dining hall committee all provide sufficient opportunities for the pupil voice and pupils interviewed valued the action that had followed these meetings, especially on the improvement of facilities specifically requested at school council meetings. Induction activities for Years 7, 9 and 12, including a residential expedition for Year 7, do much to encourage the development of friendships between pupils at an early stage. New

sixth formers identified this welcoming atmosphere as the main reason why they had settled so well into the life of the school.

- 3.6 Measures to promote good discipline and behaviour are effective. Some pupils in the questionnaire commented that the rules were not always fairly applied. However, when interviewed, pupils considered the rules to be fair and appropriately administered and the inspection team supported this view. Rewards such as ‘golds’ and commendations are sought after and house and school colours are greatly prized. Pupils commented on the lack of bullying in school. A detailed anti-bullying policy outlines the school’s expectations and the ‘life skills’ programme, assemblies and chapel sermons linked with national anti-bullying week to reinforce these messages. In Martineau’s the emphasis is very much on the development of good friendships. In the confidential questionnaire parents commented on the effective ways in which frictions in relationships are handled.
- 3.7 All matters of health and safety and welfare are dealt with in a highly professional manner. The admission register and the daily attendance registers are kept correctly. Thorough child protection policies and procedures are in operation and are well known by staff and senior pupils. Appropriate training is given in accordance with local requirements. Equally, all necessary measures are taken to reduce risk from fire and other hazards. The school has an effective policy on disability arrangements which complies with the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act. The staff handbook provides good advice on the management of all trips and the necessary risk assessments and paperwork are in use. Careful and continuous monitoring of medical procedures ensures that pupils’ medical needs are met effectively.
- 3.8 Whilst some pupils in the confidential questionnaire commented adversely on the quality of the food, the inspectors found no evidence for this. A wide range of healthy foods is on offer in the dining hall and healthy eating habits are encouraged in younger pupils through the provision of milk and fruit at break time. The dining hall committee enables pupils and staff to meet with the catering department to ensure pupils’ tastes are balanced with good dietary requirements. Pupils benefit from the many opportunities for physical exercise offered as part of the physical education curriculum and the sporting programme, and they also benefit from walking around a spacious site.
- 3.9 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the welfare, health and safety of pupils [Standard 3].

### **The Quality of Links with Parents and the Community**

- 3.10 The school has continued to build on the strong and effective links with parents and the community which were judged as good in the last report. These are now outstanding, supporting the school’s commitment to forge a partnership with parents for the further development of the aims and life of the school and to emphasise the importance of community life in a modern society.

- 3.11 Parents have a high degree of satisfaction with the education and support provided by the school. In the pre-inspection questionnaire parents described Aldenham as superb, offering just what was wanted for their children and stating that their children were lucky to be at the school. Areas of strength identified by the parents were: the academic progress of their children and the diversity of the curriculum, the worthwhile views and attitudes promoted by the school, and the good provision for boarders. Parents were also very positive about the extensive range of extra-curricular activities on offer from archery to Young Enterprise. The comments raised in the parents' questionnaire relating to special educational needs have been successfully addressed by the school.
- 3.12 Parents have many opportunities to be involved in school life and the work and progress of their children. Parents commented that they felt that Aldenham was a family and that they felt part of that family. Communication with parents is highly effective. General information, school policies and news items are readily available on the parent link of the school portal which is accessed via the school website. An excellent illustrated newsletter, *Aldenham Today* and a lively and creative annual school magazine are sent to parents: both celebrate school and house activities as well as individual success. A flourishing parents' association arranges fund-raising events such as the annual fireworks evening. Money raised has enabled the purchase of a new grand piano and cricket nets for the school. The parents work together with the staff and pupils to organise the annual leavers' summer ball, willingly offering their expertise whilst not undermining the sixth form ownership of this special event. Parents have also been invited to speak at school societies and have raised funds for individual houses and advised on house décor.
- 3.13 Parents of prospective pupils are invited to exciting open days and receive good preparation before their children join the school. An induction handbook gives new parents useful information and advice about school procedures. Regular opportunities exist for parents to meet with teachers to review the progress of their son or daughter. In Years 7 to 11 parents can attend an annual parents' evening and, in the sixth form, two parents' evenings are held each year. The school encourages pupils in Year 11 and the sixth form to accompany their parents to these events. In addition, special evening meetings are held for Year 11 to discuss subject choices and for the sixth form to discuss university courses and careers. All pupils receive half-termly grades, bi-annual reports and the results of internal tests and examinations. Reports are detailed, discuss progress and offer guidance for further development. This level of feedback is valued both by the pupils and by the parents, who stated that they felt very involved and had a true partnership between them and the school which supported their children's excellent progress.
- 3.14 Homework diaries also provide a two-way communication and these are regularly checked by tutors. Headmaster's commendation letters are sent home in recognition of consistently good work. These letters are appreciated by parents and pupils and confirm the individual support of pupils. The school addresses any specific concerns of parents with care and it is noteworthy that only two formal complaints have been made in the past two years, both of which were appropriately handled. The formal complaints procedure is comprehensive and readily available to parents.
- 3.15 Excellent links exist with the local and wider community and these enhance the personal and social development of the pupils. Two significant projects are the link with a local junior school, enabling sixth form pupils to run a programme of exciting activities for these primary school children on Saturdays and a project involving local elderly residents who enjoy lunch at the school each week and a varied programme of entertainment activities put on by the pupils. An important new development is the Independent/State School Partnership with a nearby maintained school, where funding from a government scheme enables pupils to

become members of the Aldenham School CCF. This weekly activity supports pupils' social development and awareness of life beyond Aldenham. The link is the first step in a partnership that aims to develop professional links between the staff of both schools. A well-established international link with a Polish school in Lodz has allowed exchange visits by pupils of both schools, enhancing pupils' awareness of life in Eastern Europe. A successful expedition in India this year has inspired pupils to support future expeditions in Iceland and Brazil.

- 3.16 The school is selfless in its contributions to charity. A pupils' charity committee has steered larger projects that include raising £9,000 allowing a classroom to be built for the children of Maya in Malawi. This is to be followed by a visit of pupils and teachers to the school in the summer of 2009 to decorate the classroom and assist in other ventures to support the community there, such as farming. A fashion show raised £15,000 for a trust that helps the homeless and a charity that teaches jewellery making skills to orphan children in South Africa. The houses are enthusiastically involved in a plethora of fund-raising events: younger pupils are working with the prep school on Christmas gifts for the homeless and the girls in another house actively support cancer charities.
- 3.17 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the provision of information and the manner in which complaints are to be handled [Standards 6 and 7].

### **The Quality of Boarding Education**

- 3.18 The quality of the boarding experience at Aldenham very strongly supports boarders' education and development. There were no recommendations in the last ISI report and the most recent Ofsted inspection in March 2008 rated the school's boarding provision as outstanding in four of the five key provisions of the *Every Child Matters* agenda. The success of the boarding life of the school and the high quality of current boarding provision, together with the increase in the number of nights that pupils choose to spend in boarding, confirm the school's aim to provide a safe, stimulating and supportive environment in which boarders can fulfil their potential in academic, physical, social and spiritual realms. Boarders and their parents confirm the high value they place on the boarding experience and the degree to which it contributes to the personal development of each individual boarder.
- 3.19 Relationships between the boarders, of all ages, are very strong. The atmosphere within the houses is lively, friendly, warm and supportive with pupils saying how much they value each others' company at all ages. In Paull's house, the move of the school to co-education has enabled an all girls' house to be created and the housemaster has used this opportunity to develop a tutor system where more than one year group shares a tutor. This system contributes to the integration of year groups and supports girls' education. In all the houses the different nationalities integrate well with each other and learn from each other's cultures. All pupils have the opportunity to learn the skills of tolerance and benefit from positive relationships and mutual support. Boarders report how much they feel they are members of one big community where pupils across the age range enjoy each other's company. Boarding prefects have the opportunity to contribute to the induction of new pupils, which is commented on very favourably by younger pupils.
- 3.20 Relations between staff and pupils are typified by the outstanding quality of pastoral care in all houses. Boarding staff have excellent knowledge of individual boarders and boarders express confidence in and respect for their housemaster or housemistress and spouses, tutors and matron, whom they find to be "easy to talk to, helpful considerate and caring". Parents confirmed their confidence in the boarding staff, commenting that their children were treated as young adults and enjoyed committed care. Pupils universally commented on the house

system as being of importance to their enjoyment of school life and they particularly liked the distinctiveness of each house.

- 3.21 Boarders report that they have a good range of activities. After the school day ends they value being able to use many of the school facilities and further develop their skills in artistic, sporting and other recreational and educational activities. In addition to weekday activities, a varied programme of weekend activities gives opportunities to go further afield and enjoy visits to cities such as London. Boarders welcome the extra time afforded by an earlier prep period on Wednesday evenings and this serves successfully to break up and hence pace the week for them.
- 3.22 Boarding accommodation is of a high standard with many recent improvements and the boarders are well aware of the rolling programme of refurbishment to ensure that both the décor and the facilities are of the highest standards in all of the houses. Pupil satisfaction was general and epitomised by a pupil who described his house as simply “state of the art”. Boarders are regularly consulted about ways in which the houses might be improved and this speaks volumes for the partnership and mutual respect between pupils and staff which is a hallmark of the school as a whole. Boarders sum up the quality of their boarding experience by saying how much they value the high quality of the boarding facilities, describing the buildings as a friendly environment which is safe and clean. The improvement of the physical environment and the staffing of boarding houses have been ably implemented by strong and effective leadership which has been an important factor in promoting substantial improvements for boarders.

## **4. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT**

### **The Quality of Governance**

- 4.1 The governance of the school is effective and the governing body strongly supports the aims and values of the school, providing good oversight and guidance. The governing body oversees the interests of the senior and the preparatory schools. The 2002 report commented that the school was well governed and, since then, its management structures have been further strengthened.
- 4.2 The range of professional expertise of the governors is complemented by the support of the Brewer's Company which gives financial and governance support. The governors' commitment to the development of the school is reflected in the recent commissioning of an external review of governance to ensure that the governing body is as effective as possible. The challenges for the governing body in the next decade have been identified, including the need to recruit new governors as well as manage the school's physical development.
- 4.3 Members of the governing body are well aware of their responsibilities and are appropriately involved in educational development and financial planning and are most effective in discharging their responsibilities for the pupils' welfare and health and safety. The governors' management structure has been carefully developed so that the main committees report to the full governing body. The academic committee welcomes to their meetings heads of department, who report on academic initiatives and members of this committee attend lessons, visit the houses and follow students for a day. Governors are aware that they are not yet well known to parents and have implemented strategies to achieve this.
- 4.4 The governors both monitor and contribute to the school's development plan. In recent years the fulfilment of this plan has seen the building of new facilities, the completion of the preparatory school, the development of full co-education and the commitment to increasing boarding provision at all ages. It is testament to the vision of the managers of the school that the boarding numbers have increased, when, but a few years ago, consideration had been given to reducing boarding provision.
- 4.5 The composition of the governing body is regularly reviewed. New governors receive training and the individual support of more experienced governors, but this area is not yet sufficiently developed. The statutes and regulations of governance are clear and comprehensive, confirming commitment to legal compliance. Governors are well informed of the workings of the school and provide advice, support and stimulus for growth and improvement. The finances of the school are carefully monitored. In 2007 the governors undertook a bursarial review, resulting in a new appointment of a director of finance in addition to the bursar, both of whom are members of the senior management team (SMT).

## **The Quality of Leadership and Management**

- 4.6 The school is well led and managed. The 2002 report commented that the school was managed with thoughtful efficiency. Since 2002, due to the new leadership and also the commitment of the SMT and governing body, who all support the school's aims, a number of major issues have been successfully tackled but the management has not, as yet, fully addressed two of the last report's recommendations on staff appraisal and monitoring of teaching.
- 4.7 Parents are strong in their praise of the educational experience enjoyed by their children, describing Aldenham as having a caring and nurturing environment and concentrating on pupils' all-round character and skills. Parents say that the school is very well led, very well managed and offers excellent pastoral support. Pupils also are very supportive, one stating: "Aldenham has a good atmosphere and encourages pupils to go out of their comfort zone and try new things". Under strong and effective senior leadership, the number of pupils has grown and parents confirm the school's increased reputation.
- 4.8 Clear educational direction and leadership are provided by those with management responsibilities, particularly in the areas of the curriculum, pastoral care and pupils' personal development. The effectiveness of the management is reflected in its implementation of the new school week, instituted at the start of the last academic year. The SMT has carefully monitored the effects of this change, making adjustments in the light of experience and feedback from pupils and parents.
- 4.9 Management is aware, however, that recommendations in the last report about appraisal and the monitoring of teaching have not been fully grasped. The last report recommended an appraisal system led by heads of department. The implementation of this had not been that successful in practice and a system is being developed using eight senior members of staff as appraisers. Whilst the system and necessary documentation have been well developed, it has not, as yet, been put into practice. The last report also recommended that the school should continue to improve the quality of teaching by encouraging a culture of lesson observation. Whilst some lesson observation has been established, some unevenness in the quality of teaching confirms that this recommendation has not been fully met. Two further recommendations on professional development and improvement of ICT have been well implemented.
- 4.10 The school is also aware that the effectiveness of the heads of department is varied. In a number of cases they undertake lesson observation, but on occasion without any record or formal feedback. Members of departments work closely together, on an informal basis, as well as formally through departmental meetings for which minutes are kept. As senior management is aware, departmental development plans are not produced in any formal way nor linked to the school's development plan.
- 4.11 Heads of house and the house teams are the backbone of pastoral care. Parents comment that tutors are strongly supportive of the pupils in their tutor groups and that, by being based in the individual houses, tutors are able to give each pupil much individual support.
- 4.12 The school's checking of the suitability of staff and proprietors is centralised, rigorous and clearly documented. Recruitment strategies are thorough and involve heads of department and senior managers. New staff are well supported through induction and mentoring. The school is committed to supporting newly qualified teachers (NQTs) and staff in training, and manages their programmes appropriately. NQTs confirm how well they are supported in this crucial year of their careers.

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- 4.13 The bursarial team fully supports the aims of the school and contributes to the quality of education pupils enjoy at Aldenham. Finances and resources are very well managed to meet the needs of the pupils. The very good premises and grounds are maintained by caring and motivated support staff, whose contributions are appreciated by pupils and staff. The administration of the school is efficient. The administrative staff are welcoming and approachable, and, with the support of the ever-developing ICT system, ensure that communication is prompt and effective.
- 4.14 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the suitability of proprietors and staff and for premises and accommodation [Standards 4 and 5].
- 4.15 The school participates in the national scheme for the induction of newly qualified teachers and meets its requirements.

## **5. CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS**

### **Overall Conclusions**

- 5.1 Aldenham has many strengths and is very successful in fulfilling its aims. Its pupils enjoy a rich educational experience and develop into personable, caring and engaging individuals. Pupils' good academic and wider achievements stem from committed and supportive teaching and the pupils' desire to develop all their skills. Pupils benefit from an outstanding quality of pastoral care based on the houses, which they value strongly. They are fully supported in their personal development by highly committed pastoral and academic staff who contribute strongly to the pupils' outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development by ensuring pupils enjoy a wide range of experiences which pupils acknowledge as life-enhancing. Links with parents and the wider community are outstanding and contribute to the quality of the pupils' education. Boarding pupils enjoy an excellent boarding experience that adds much to their personal development. Pupils throughout the school relate exceptionally well with each other and benefit from supportive relationships with their teachers. The school is dynamically led and supported by a committed governing body. It has a few areas for development.
- 5.2 Since the last ISI inspection report, the school has moved forward significantly. Pupils' academic achievement has improved, pupils benefiting from the raising of teaching standards and the greater use of ICT. The personal development of pupils and the school's links with parents and the community have been strongly enhanced. Most of the recommendations of the last report have been met, apart from the development of staff appraisal and the full monitoring of teaching. The last Ofsted boarding welfare report (March 2008) made no recommendations for action.
- 5.3 The school meets all the regulatory requirements.

### **Next Steps**

- 5.4 The school has no major weaknesses. However, to achieve further improvements in the education it provides it should:
1. further develop strategies to monitor teaching;
  2. put into action the new staff appraisal programme linked to professional development;
  3. support heads of department in the effective management of their departments, including the furtherance of departmental development plans linked to the school development plan;
  4. develop and promote the support programme for gifted and talented pupils.
- 5.5 No action is required in respect of regulatory requirements.

## 6. SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE

- 6.1 The inspection was carried out from 24<sup>th</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> November 2008. The inspectors examined samples of pupils' work, observed lessons and conducted formal interviews with pupils. They held discussions with teaching and non-teaching staff and with governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended registration sessions, a chapel service and an assembly. Inspectors visited boarding houses and the medical centre. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined a range of documentation made available by the school.

### List of Inspectors

Mr Adrian Underwood	Reporting Inspector
Mrs Sandra Clements	Deputy Head, GSA school
Mr Chris Cleugh	Headmaster, HMC school
Mr Jeremy Gladwin	Headmaster, HMC school
Mr Alasdair McBay	Senior Tutor, HMC school
Mr Martin Reader	Headmaster, HMC school
Mr Stéphane Talleux	Assistant Head, GSA school