

Aylesford School - Sports College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118882
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	358464
Inspection dates	30 September 2010–1 October 2010
Reporting inspector	Helen Hutchings

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1008
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Peter Divall
Headteacher	Douglas Lawson
Date of previous school inspection	20 May 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by five additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 39 lessons involving 39 teachers, and meetings were held with representative governors, staff and groups of pupils. They observed the school's work and looked at planning documents, assessment information and pupils' work. In addition, 119 questionnaires from parents and carers and 52 staff questionnaires were received and analysed along with 198 from pupils.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following.

- The focused support for pupils, particularly in English and mathematics, and its impact on improving performance in those subjects and overall GCSE results.
- How well teaching promotes the achievement of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities given the indication of some previous underachievement.
- The extent to which recent training for middle managers is helping them to make improvements in their areas.
- How effective sixth-form provision is in enabling students to move successfully to further education or employment.

Information about the school

Aylesford School Sports College is similar in size to most secondary schools, serving an area where approximately 30% of more able pupils from the local primary schools are selected to attend neighbouring grammar schools. The vast majority of students are White British, and very few pupils speak English as an additional language. There are more students with special educational needs and/or disabilities than average. The school was awarded specialist sports status in 2004. It provides joint sixth form provision within a consortium of four schools. Over the last year, the school has been given National Challenge support through a programme designed to raise pupils' attainment.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Although its overall effectiveness remains satisfactory, Aylesford School has many good aspects to its performance. These include good care, guidance and support and pupils' good personal development, which prepare them well for their future economic well-being. All pupils leaving the school from Year 11 this year entered employment or gained entry to further educational courses. Students leaving the sixth form were equally successful, with a large majority going to university; many being the first members of their family to do so.

Difficulties in recruiting suitably experienced staff in recent years, particularly in English, mathematics and information and communication technology, have prevented the school moving forward as quickly as it would have wished in all areas. However, pupils' GCSE results have improved significantly and the proportion achieving five or more GCSE subjects at grade C or above is now above the national average. Pupils achieve good results in a range of vocational and applied subjects, indicating the positive improvement in the curriculum, which meets pupils' needs well. However, in spite of improvement since the last inspection, the school has not yet met the national minimum expectation for the percentage achieving good grades in English and mathematics. Consequently, pupils' achievement remains satisfactory, and in a few lessons, low literacy skills slows learning in other subjects. The school has set challenging targets for future performance and current assessment information indicates that it is set for further improvement. Teachers consistently share clear criteria for reaching higher levels in lessons, but do not always use the information they have about pupils' current levels as the starting point for pupils' tasks. A few parents and carers indicated that homework is inconsistent. The school has a new homework policy and schedule but has been slow in implementing this at the start of the academic year, and pupils have not been given enough homework to make a significant contribution to their learning.

Pupils' commitment and enjoyment of school are reflected in their above-average attendance. Pupils are very positive about the opportunities offered by the school. They thoroughly enjoy the emphasis on sporting activities as part of the school's specialist provision, taking the need to develop healthy lifestyles seriously. They are keen to point out that there are plenty of activities available to meet a wider range of interests. Sixth-form students have a positive impact on the whole school, being fully integrated around the site, and support younger pupils to contribute positively to school life and the wider community. Behaviour is good in lessons and around the school, enabling pupils to enjoy their social time together. Pupils feel safe, knowing that bullying and harassment are addressed well in school.

The headteacher leads the school with a calm and resolute approach, which is shared by other senior leaders and staff who understand exactly what has to be done to bring about further improvements. A concerted and systematic approach to improving the consistency

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of teaching is starting to prove effective, and recent successful recruitment and retention of staff has brought about the stability required for ongoing improvement. The school has rightly identified that the next steps need to include strengthening middle leadership skills and giving all staff the support they need to improve their professional practice further. Staff are proud to work in the school and, supported by governors and the local authority, are implementing a coherent set of actions to raise attainment. Since the last inspection changes to the curriculum have improved pupils' attitudes to school enabling them to play a much fuller part in school life, which together with the increase in their attainment, indicates the school's good capacity for sustained improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment in English and mathematics by:
 - implementing a focused approach to improving literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum
 - ensuring that homework makes a more effective contribution to pupils' learning in all subjects.
- Improve the consistency of teaching by:
 - ensuring that all middle leaders identify and disseminate good practice within their subjects
 - building on the training already undertaken to ensure that learning tasks are always closely focused on pupils' prior attainment.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Because pupils enter the school with attainment in English, mathematics and science which is below the national average, in spite of making satisfactory progress, their attainment remains below average. However, the introduction of courses matched well to pupils' abilities is bringing about significant improvement in their overall attainment and generating a climate of success where pupils of all abilities can achieve. The proportion of pupils achieving good grades in science and sport is above average. Careful and rigorous tracking identifies groups of students who are underachieving and interventions have had positive results; for example, a specific programme to boost girls' aspirations has successfully improved their overall performance, which is now above the national average overall, but not yet in English and mathematics. Recent changes in the curriculum are ensuring that the progress of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities has improved, reversing a pattern where this group did not make as much progress as their peers. Pupils have good attitudes to learning and want to achieve, which means that they benefit from sharing and articulating their thinking in group or paired work. In lessons when reporting back to the class and when speaking informally, pupils often display better communication skills than when assessed more formally in English.

Pupils appreciate and respect the space they have within the buildings, and the consistent values shared by staff and pupils ensure that the environment is safe and welcoming. Pupils say that there is always an adult they can turn to when advice or support is needed. The sports specialism has been successfully used to focus on the development of personal and social skills, effectively promoting pupils' health and well-being and raising aspirations

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for academic achievement. There are many opportunities for pupils to take responsibility, for example as sports leaders sharing their skills in local primary schools; the extension of the programme more widely across the school is enabling even more pupils to make a valuable contribution in this way. The strong positive relationships, promoted effectively through the mixed-age tutor groups, mean that pupils develop a good appreciation of differences and others' points of view. This was exemplified during a Year 11 lesson in the empathetic discussion on cultural differences and challenges faced by Muslim women wishing to participate in fitness training.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

How effective is the provision?

The majority of teaching seen in the inspection was satisfactory, but ranged from outstanding to inadequate in a small minority of lessons. Pupils particularly like the consistent practice of letting them know what they need to do to reach the highest level, but teachers do not always use the good tracking information they hold on pupils' attainment to set tasks which are closely matched to the range of starting points in the class. In the best lessons, teachers probe pupils' understanding and use their good subject knowledge to respond to pupils' opinions and ideas. For example, in a Year 8 humanities lesson where pupils were considering the contribution of religious organisations in solving poverty, a variety of activities engaged pupils and learning was brought together by good, targeted questioning so that pupils developed a clear understanding of the issues.

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Teachers use strategies such as encouraging pupils to read aloud to promote reading and comprehension skills, but the school has not implemented a whole-school strategy to support literacy, particularly to support pupils' writing skills.

The range of curriculum pathways throughout the school are matched well to pupils' abilities, and advice provided at key transition points ensures that pupils follow programmes most closely matched to their needs. Provision is evaluated rigorously and changes made, for example in ceasing courses by external providers which had only limited success rates. The extensive range of strategies implemented last year to promote improvement resulted in only a small increase in the proportion of pupils achieving good grades in both English and mathematics because some pupils were involved in too many intervention activities. However, staff have developed their understanding and confidence to use only those aspects of the National Challenge programme which are likely to bring about significant improvement. Parents and carers and pupils have a high regard for the school's care and guidance, with particular appreciation expressed by parents or carers of some pupils whose circumstances make them vulnerable.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The strength of leadership of the headteacher and leadership team is seen in the successful promotion of positive attitudes and aspirations in pupils and provision which enables them to move into courses and employment of their choice on leaving school. Enthusiastic middle leaders recognise where the school needs to improve, understand their accountability for academic standards in their subjects and have taken ownership of the challenges faced, for example the need to improve English, mathematics and information and communication technology. There are many examples of good subject leadership but best practice is not consistently embedded across the school which restricts pupils' performance. Data are used well to target action and interventions are currently improving achievement through the school to reduce the extent of 'emergency' work being targeted in Year 11. Senior leaders have an accurate understanding of the quality of teaching which they use effectively in staff training and development. They have taken a robust approach to address inadequate teaching, and although progress in the past has been slowed because of staffing changes, teaching is now improving steadily.

The governing body knows the school well and changed structures are helping it to take effective strategic oversight of the school's work. The governing body is actively involved in monitoring and evaluating the issues that have an impact on learning so that they are aware of the initiatives which have not worked effectively and the reasons for this. There

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is a high priority on ensuring the safety and well-being of pupils, and procedures effectively ensure that requirements relating to safety and child protection are met well. The school strives hard to keep in touch with parents and carers, running a range of activities, including work linked to promoting adult literacy. Because links beyond the school are evaluated thoroughly, they are constantly amended to provide additional opportunities for pupils; for example, a partnership with the local Magistrates' Court effectively supports a few pupils at risk of exclusion. The sports specialism makes a major contribution to effective partnerships, including well-developed links with local primary and secondary schools, providing support for sports activities while developing pupils' leadership skills. The school is an inclusive and cohesive community. The performance of different groups of pupils is monitored regularly and used to guide pupils' curriculum choices, ensuring good equality of opportunity and that discrimination is tackled robustly. Links with schools in Tower Hamlets raise pupils' understanding of different cultures within England and links with Africa, including a biennial visit supporting educational activities at an orphanage, satisfactorily extend pupils' awareness of their place within a global community.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Views of parents and carers

A very large majority of parents and carers responding to the inspection questionnaire are satisfied with the educational experience pupils receive in the school. The response rate was low and those responding are most satisfied that pupils are safe and that the school meets individual needs. A small number, particularly parents and carers of Key Stage 3 pupils, commented that they do not have enough information about pupils' progress. The school has launched online access for current information on attendance and up-to-date assessments but, as this is being implemented gradually, it has only been explained to parents and carers of older pupils. Other concerns related to encouragement for healthy

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lifestyles and homework. Inspectors found during this inspection that homework is not currently making an effective contribution to pupils' learning. The food on offer in the canteen includes healthy options, although some pupils choose to bring in less healthy options, but this is balanced by an understanding of the choices they are making.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Aylesford School - Sports College to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 119 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1008 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	47	39	56	47	13	11	3	3
The school keeps my child safe	53	45	61	51	2	2	2	2
My school informs me about my child's progress	25	21	62	52	17	14	2	2
My child is making enough progress at this school	30	25	58	49	18	15	3	3
The teaching is good at this school	25	21	63	53	15	13	2	2
The school helps me to support my child's learning	25	21	49	41	28	24	4	3
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	25	21	68	57	20	17	1	1
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	39	33	55	46	9	8	2	2
The school meets my child's particular needs	30	25	63	53	14	12	2	2
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	35	29	56	47	9	8	8	7
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	22	18	52	44	21	18	3	3
The school is led and managed effectively	43	36	48	40	12	10	3	3
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	43	36	53	45	12	10	4	3

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement. ■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils. ■ The quality of teaching. ■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships. ■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



4 October 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Aylesford School - Sports College, Aylesford ME20 7JU

On behalf of the inspectors who visited your school recently, I thank you for the time you gave to talk to us and for making us so welcome. I write to tell you our findings. We have taken the views of pupils, parents and carers into account alongside observations of your learning in lessons to make our judgement that the school provides you with a satisfactory education; it also provides you with good care and guidance.

Staff, under the careful guidance of the headteacher and senior team, successfully ensure that you are able to move to courses or employment of your choice when you leave school. You told us that teachers make learning interesting and that you enjoy good relationships with other pupils. The curriculum pathways suit your needs well. You particularly enjoy the opportunities offered by attending a sports college and participate well in a wide range of extra-curricular activities. These help you to keep fit and healthy and the canteen serves healthy food. However, we noticed that some of you bring less healthy food into school. Older pupils make particularly good progress in their vocational courses such as science and sport. We were impressed with how the level and grade criteria in lessons help you to aim for higher attainment. While you make satisfactory progress, you need to continue to work hard to improve your attainment, particularly in English and mathematics. To help you to do this and for the school to continue to improve, we have asked the staff to:

- find ways to help you to improve your English and mathematics skills across the curriculum
- make sure that you have more homework which complements your work in lessons
- identify the best teaching practice and share this well with each other
- ensure that the tasks set in lessons build well on what you already know and can do so that you can reach the highest possible 'WILF' objective.

We wish you all the very best for your own futures.

Yours sincerely

Helen Hutchings

Lead Inspector

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