

Aylesbury Vale Academy

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	135879
Local Authority	N/A
Inspection number	381947
Inspection dates	16–17 November 2011
Reporting inspector	Gill Close HMI

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

Type of school	Academy
School category	Non-maintained
Age range of pupils	11-18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	867
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	118
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Gordon Joyner
Principal	Fiona Froment (Acting Principal)
Date of previous school inspection	N/A
School address	Weedon Road Aylesbury Buckinghamshire HP19 9PG
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Age group	11-18
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by four of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one additional inspector.

They observed 34 lessons taught by 33 teachers, and held meetings with students, staff and governors. Their observations of the academy's work included brief visits to further lessons and support sessions, registrations and assemblies. They observed break and lunchtime activity. They looked at records of students' attainment and progress, the academy's improvement planning, self-evaluation, lesson monitoring documents, policies, minutes of governing body meetings, exclusion data and attendance figures. They also evaluated questionnaire responses from 147 parents and carers, 126 students and 27 staff.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the academy's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- How well do different groups of students learn and make progress in English and literacy?
- To what extent does the curriculum meet students' needs, provide support and challenge, offer suitable breadth of academic and vocational options for future progression, and develop the cross-curricular skills of literacy and numeracy?
- How effectively are monitoring, evaluation and tracking used at all levels to drive up quality in teaching and improve outcomes?

Information about the school

Aylesbury Vale Academy, sponsored by the Oxford Diocesan Board of Education and Buckinghamshire County Council, opened in September 2009 in the same buildings as its predecessor school. Plans are under way for a move to a new building on a different site in September 2013. The academy's specialist subjects are science, technology, and information and communication technology. Since 1 July 2011, the academy has been led by an acting principal and there have been a number of changes in senior and middle leadership.

The number of students on roll is smaller than average. Two fifths of them are from minority ethnic groups, with the largest proportion of these being of Pakistani heritage. One third of students speak a first language other than English. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is average. One quarter of students are identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. The main ones are moderate learning or behavioural, social and emotional difficulties. The percentage of students with statements of special educational needs is average.

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

3

Main findings

Aylesbury Vale Academy provides a satisfactory standard of education. Students make satisfactory progress and enjoy attending. Their parents and carers are happy with their experience at the academy. The good quality of care, guidance and support has brought about substantial improvements in attendance and behaviour since the academy opened. Improvements in the quality of teaching and the tracking of students' performance led to the rise in achievement in 2011 that is continuing for current students. Achievement is satisfactory. Students join the academy with attainment that is significantly below average, but the attainment of current students across subjects has risen closer to national averages and is broadly average overall. Nevertheless, low levels of literacy impede students' progress across the curriculum. Leaders have correctly identified the need for a whole-academy emphasis on improving literacy and have recently taken a more strategic approach to developing literacy skills, but some lessons do not do this effectively enough.

Teaching is satisfactory. There is much good teaching that motivates and challenges students, but a minority of lessons do not meet the needs of all students, so that those who are underachieving are not helped to catch up quickly. In these lessons, teachers do not monitor everyone's progress or give students enough opportunity to develop their understanding and explanation, build their independence or assess their work. This contributes to the variation in students' progress across subjects and groups. The academy's analyses of data have helped to identify some areas of weakness and bring about improvement, such as the discontinuation of underperforming AS level courses in the sixth form. However, they are not flexible enough to pinpoint all underachieving groups or synthesised sufficiently perceptively to inform sharply focused action plans. Leaders generally make accurate evaluations of teaching in lessons which they use to raise its quality, but monitoring and support have not been focused systematically enough on students' progress to improve the quality of the weaker teaching rapidly. The acting principal has quickly harnessed the skills of new leaders and focused staff successfully on raising attainment and progress. The accuracy of self-evaluation and improvements since opening demonstrate the academy's satisfactory capacity for sustained improvement.

Up to 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment and the rates of progress for individuals and groups by supporting the development of literacy in all lessons and improving teaching quality to consistently good or better by:
 - using assessment information to plan lessons that meet the needs of all students, particularly those who are underachieving
 - monitoring and extending students' understanding and quality of explanation throughout lessons
 - helping students to develop greater independence and awareness of the quality of evidence that demonstrates progression, through using well-crafted success criteria to assess their own and peers' work.

- Strengthen leadership and management at all levels by:
 - ensuring monitoring and evaluation are sharply focused on accurate assessment of students' progress in lessons and the outcomes over time for individuals and groups
 - analysing, synthesising and comparing data for individuals and groups astutely to pinpoint and tackle underperformance swiftly
 - linking evaluation clearly to sharply focused action plans containing success criteria with interim steps that are measurable, then monitoring the progress towards them
 - identifying and sharing good practice systematically.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Students generally arrive promptly at lessons and settle down to work conscientiously. They participate keenly in group activities when given the opportunity. In some lessons, they are more passive, do not develop independence, and learn skills satisfactorily but do not deepen their understanding.

The initial examination results for 2011 show a substantial rise in the proportion of students achieving five GCSEs or equivalent at grades A*-C, including English and mathematics, to 39%, but this remains below average. The academy's records and students' work show that progress in English is satisfactory and current students are on track to do markedly better than in 2011, when progress was well below the national average. Students known to be eligible for free school meals have lower overall attainment than others; a similar proportion to their peers attain grade C or above in GCSE English and mathematics, so their performance in other subjects is weaker. The attainment and progress of White British boys, particularly in English, were low last year, but the academy's data show that the gap is closing for current students. Those who receive support through school action plus or school action are making satisfactory and improved progress. Students who speak a first language other than English achieve at least as well as their peers, and girls with Pakistani heritage achieve more highly than the academy's average.

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Last year, students made inadequate progress between Key Stages 2 and 4 in GCSE science, physical education, geography and food technology. Changes in courses and teaching are contributing to improved progress for current students, although the limited availability of subject specialist staff constrains progress in geography. Students make satisfactory progress, and sometimes better, in vocational BTEC courses. The academy’s records show that students are making improved progress during Key Stage 3, although leaders recognise that some of the teachers’ assessments on which this is based may lack accuracy.

Behaviour is satisfactory. Students are largely responsive in lessons and, in the best lessons, behave well. Students feel safe and know how to deal with risks, for example, when using the internet or soldering irons. Bullying is rare and is dealt with effectively. Behaviour around the site is generally courteous, although occasionally boisterous. The number of exclusions has reduced greatly since last year. Students reflect on moral issues and respond well to drama, such as in an assembly on bullying. They respect each other’s cultures, for example when discussing immigration. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. Students take on responsibilities, for example as prefects and academy council members, but have not been instrumental in decision making about key issues in the academy, such as the plans for the new building. Students know the importance of healthy food and exercise and some participate keenly in sports clubs, but the quality of lunch available does not encourage the majority of them to eat healthily and there is less than the recommended time for physical education in Key Stage 4. Attendance is above average for most groups of students. Together with their sound application of basic skills, this prepares them satisfactorily for their future economic well-being.

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	3
Pupils’ behaviour	3
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	3
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils’ attendance ¹	2

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

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The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

3

How effective is the provision?

Teachers use their secure subject knowledge to explain ideas clearly and, in the best lessons, they ask probing questions and design activities that deepen students' understanding and develop their skills in explanation. In other lessons, students spend too much time listening to the teacher to develop the independence and reasoning they need in order to make good progress. Teachers use data to identify groups of students and to plan three different levels of objective for each lesson, but do not consistently match these objectives and the learning activities to the specific needs of individuals, particularly those who are underachieving. In some lessons, teachers miss opportunities to monitor students' progress or to develop their literacy and help them overcome barriers to learning that their level of literacy poses. There are good examples of involving students in forming success criteria and assessing their work against them, so they discover the depth of understanding and explanation needed to demonstrate progression, but this is not the norm. A new system of marking to provide regular opportunities for students to respond has begun to have an impact, although its use is inconsistent.

The curriculum meets students' needs adequately. It is adapted constantly, for example to replace courses with poor performance and to increase the take-up of modern foreign languages. The International Baccalaureate in Years 7 and 8 and the increased opportunity to gain accreditation in Year 9 provide students with appropriate breadth and goals. At Key Stage 4, the broad range of vocational courses, including those provided by external partners, motivates students and has been shown to increase their confidence and attendance. Off-site courses cause students to miss some English and mathematics lessons, but the support systems do not always enable them to catch up effectively. Approaches to raising literacy across the curriculum include intervention in Year 7 and recently introduced literacy targets for each student in every subject. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities receive individualised computer-based help with literacy. Leaders have rightly prioritised reviewing the curriculum to support higher attainment and achievement, such as through devoting longer time to fewer subjects, and have already put more resources into Key Stage 3.

The pastoral system of vertical tutor groups helps build the cohesive community. Its grouping into three colleges is organised efficiently, with all students known well by their college staff team. Students praise the system, which provides them with an open door to obtain support, and are confident that staff will deal with issues. Tutors use tracking effectively to inform their discussions with students, particularly the mentoring sessions with students in Year 11 in which targets are set and reviewed. Staff work together successfully, informed by data for each student, to raise attendance, improve behaviour and provide interventions where they identify underachievement. This has had a marked impact. Mentoring and personalised timetables have improved the behaviour and attendance of potentially vulnerable

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students. Students are supported well in making the transition into Year 7, and value the advice they receive to inform their choices for the future.

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	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The acting principal conveys a clear vision for driving up attainment and progress that staff share. Targets for these are challenging. Accurate evaluation feeds into action plans that identify appropriate priorities although they do not consistently include milestones towards measurable success criteria so that progress against them can be monitored frequently. Leaders improve teaching quality through coaching and support, but lesson observations do not identify sufficiently sharp areas for development to bring about rapid improvement towards milestones. Tracking of students' performance is regular and used soundly by staff to support individuals. But it lacks consistency in the way progress towards targets is evaluated and is not used flexibly enough to analyse both the progress and attainment of groups in relation to previous and national data. The governing body has taken a number of steps to help shape the strategic direction of the academy and to challenge areas of weakness. But its work is not informed by well-targeted and easily analysed data. It meets with curriculum leaders in rotation but does not have systematic ways of seeking views frequently from students, parents, carers and staff. Some new members have recently taken up their posts.

The academy promotes equal opportunity and tackles discrimination satisfactorily. Its actions to improve achievement and well-being when it identifies gaps have had a positive impact. Incidents of discrimination are few and are dealt with robustly. However, analyses of data are not sufficiently refined to inform a systematic approach to closing gaps across the wide range of outcomes for achievement and well-being. The academy knows its context well and achieves a harmonious community, although there is limited engagement with groups beyond the locality and no systematic evaluation of the impact of its work to promote community cohesion. The academy provides a range of ways for parents and carers to communicate with it, including through questionnaires at parents' evenings. It generally responds promptly but sometimes communications are less timely. All safeguarding requirements are met. Procedures for appointing staff are thorough, but some records of actions lack transparency. Much risk assessment is comprehensive and leaders respond rapidly when issues are identified. A range of partnerships make a good contribution to students' achievement and well-being, for

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example through providing access to vocational courses, information and communication technology projects and mentoring.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
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	3
The effectiveness of the school’s engagement with parents and carers	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Sixth form

Students make satisfactory progress on the A level and BTEC courses provided in the sixth form. All who applied for higher education last year were successful in securing and taking up a place. In contrast, progress on AS level courses was inadequate in the last two years, so leaders withdrew them from this year’s provision. The range of courses is limited but meets the needs of current students. They have opportunities to participate in sports leadership and young enterprise programmes and to improve upon their GCSE grades in English and mathematics. Current students are making satisfactory progress towards suitably challenging targets as a result of satisfactory teaching and careful monitoring of their progress by subject tutors, who also provide individual mentoring sessions. Students contribute actively to the community, for example as mentors to younger students and primary school pupils. Their attendance is high and they form a close-knit group that one student described as ‘like a family’. Leaders monitor teaching and students’ progress frequently. They evaluate the provision and outcomes accurately and have used their findings to produce a clear action plan with appropriate priorities.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	3
Taking into account: Outcomes for students in the sixth form	3
	3

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The quality of provision in the sixth form Leadership and management of the sixth form	3
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Views of parents and carers

A very large majority of the parents and carers who completed the questionnaire agree that they are happy with their children’s experience at the academy and that their children enjoy attending and are kept safe. A very small minority disagree that the academy informs them about their children’s progress or takes account of their suggestions and concerns, and a few commented that they do not feel informed about staffing changes. Inspectors found that communication with parents and carers is satisfactory although timeliness and clarity are variable, for example in reports on students’ progress. A few parents and carers disagree that the academy prepares their children well for the future or meets their particular needs. Inspectors found good-quality care for students’ well-being and satisfactory provision of curriculum and teaching to meet individual needs. A few parents and carers disagree that the academy is led and managed effectively. Inspectors found that the recent temporary and permanent changes in staffing have been harnessed effectively to provide satisfactory leadership and management, which is enabling staff to work productively together with a shared vision. A few parents and carers disagree that the academy helps their children to have a healthy lifestyle. Inspectors found that the lunch available is chosen by a low proportion of students and the time allocated for physical education is below the expected two hours per week for students in Key Stage 4.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Aylesbury Vale Academy 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 147 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 867 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	36	24	100	68	6	4	3	2
The school keeps my child safe	40	27	98	67	8	5	0	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	35	24	85	58	18	12	4	3
My child is making enough progress at this school	26	18	99	67	11	7	6	4
The teaching is good at this school	25	17	107	73	9	6	2	1
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	24	16	100	68	11	7	5	3
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	20	14	98	67	20	14	3	2
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)	27	18	94	64	8	5	2	1
The school meets my child’s particular needs	20	14	100	68	18	12	3	2
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	33	22	89	61	16	11	7	5
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	21	14	98	67	13	9	6	4
The school is led and managed effectively	19	13	90	61	20	14	8	5
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	35	24	97	66	5	3	5	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	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

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 2010 to 08 April 2011 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 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.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

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.



18 November 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Aylesbury Vale Academy, Aylesbury HP19 9PG

Thank you for welcoming us so warmly when we visited the academy and for telling us about it. Most of you and your parents and carers told us that you enjoy the academy. We could see this too from the improved attendance.

We found that the academy provides you with a satisfactory education. It helps you to increase your rate of progress, but there is still some way to go for everyone to reach average attainment. Some of you have difficulties with literacy, which can hold back your progress in many subjects. You told us that teaching was better in some lessons than others. We found much good teaching that involves you in interesting and challenging activities. There are also some lessons where the work is too difficult or easy for you or does not make you think hard, so you do not make good progress. Sometimes, you do not have the chance to develop your independence or assess how well you are doing.

Staff look after you well and follow up any concerns, so you feel safe. You get on with each other and most of you behave sensibly in lessons and around the academy. The acting principal and staff have helped the academy to improve.

We have asked the academy to:

- raise your attainment and progress by improving teaching so that it is all good and helping to improve literacy in every lesson
- keep checking how well everyone is doing so that improvement is quick.

You can help by trying hard to understand and explain what you are learning, making sure you know what words mean and assessing whether you are meeting your targets in lessons.

I wish you success at the academy and in helping it to improve.

Yours sincerely

Gill Close
Her Majesty's Inspector

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