

Amery Hill School

Amery Hill, Alton, Hampshire, GU34 2BZ

Inspection dates 12–13 December 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Attainment is high. GCSE results in 2012 improved much more strongly than those nationally to further widen the gap between the school's results and those of others.
- Students' progress is good overall and very strong in a number of key subjects, including the specialist subjects of mathematics and music.
- Teaching is good overall and there is much excellent practice. Teachers generally have high expectations for their students' achievement. They plan activities thoughtfully and manage their classes very well to create the right conditions for effective learning.
- The headteacher promotes a strong vision for a school which offers a rounded experience for its students.
- Alongside good academic achievement, students' personal development flourishes. They participate in an extensive extra-curricular programme encompassing sport, the arts and many subject-related trips and visits.
- Students' behaviour is outstanding. They are mutually respectful of each other and polite and helpful to visitors. They take on a great deal of responsibility for the smooth running and improvement of the school, for example as prefects and lesson observers.
- Leadership and management of the school are good. The leadership of teaching has been highly effective in improving the quality of teachers' practice, especially in planning engaging lessons.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The progress made by students eligible for support from the pupil premium, and groups including disabled students and those with special educational needs, requires improvement.
- The school does not use information about the progress of key groups of students with enough precision to measure the success of actions taken to raise achievement.
- There is some variation in the quality of teaching. Tasks in a small number of lessons are not adapted well enough to support and challenge students of all abilities. In some classes, the teachers' marking does not give students specific enough guidance on how to improve their work.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 34 teachers in 38 lessons, and carried out some joint observations and shorter visits to lessons with members of the school’s senior team. Observations of other aspects of the school’s work were also made, including visits to an additional learning session before school for higher attainers in mathematics, form time and an assembly.
- Meetings were held with groups of students, with the Chair of the Governing Body and with school staff, including senior and middle leaders. Informal discussions also took place with staff and students.
- Questionnaire returns from 68 staff were analysed.
- Inspectors took account of 47 responses to the online Parent View questionnaire in carrying out the inspection, along with written comments from one parent or carer. Evidence from the school’s own survey of parents and carers was also examined.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documentation, including the school’s self-evaluation and development plans, its safeguarding policies, and minutes of meetings of the governing body.

Inspection team

Ian Hodgkinson, Lead inspector

Her Majesty’s Inspector

Teresa Gilpin

Additional inspector

Patricia MacLachlan

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Una Maria Stevens

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Full report

Information about this school

- Amery Hill School is similar in size to most other secondary schools. It converted to an academy in October 2011. When its predecessor school of the same name was inspected in 2007, it was judged to be a good school.
- The school serves the small town of Alton and surrounding villages. Most pupils are White British.
- A very small proportion of students are eligible for support from the pupil premium (additional funding provided by the government, mainly for students known to be eligible for free school meals).
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs supported at school action is above average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is below average.
- The school achieved specialist designation in music in 2004. It was awarded a second specialism in mathematics in 2009. In 2010, in recognition of its academic standards, it acquired Leading Edge status. It consistently exceeds government floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- A small proportion of students at Key Stage 4 attend other schools or colleges in a local consortium for between half-a-day and two days a week. They do so to follow vocational or wider academic options which are not offered by the school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the achievement of disabled students and those with special educational needs, together with that of students eligible for support from the pupil premium, by:
 - ensuring that the progress of these groups is monitored incisively in all subjects and across the whole school
 - sharply evaluating the impact of actions taken to improve the attainment and attendance of these students, and swiftly changing provision where progress is identified as slow
 - making school improvement planning more effective by setting precise criteria for measuring the success of actions taken to raise the achievement of these groups of students, and for subjects and year groups.
- Ensure that all teaching matches the high standards set in the best lessons, by ensuring that teachers consistently:
 - adapt the level of challenge in the tasks they set their classes, in order to stretch the middle and higher attainers and to help those who find learning more difficult to make rapid progress
 - give students clear and specific guidance on how to raise the quality of their work.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students' attainment on joining the school in Year 7 is above average, and more arrive from their primary schools with the highest levels of attainment than found in most schools.
- By the time students leave the school in Year 11, their attainment is high. This is so for most subjects and for most groups of students.
- The school has successfully narrowed the gaps in attainment between subjects identified as a key area for improvement in the last inspection report. A relative weakness remains in modern languages, especially German. Progress has been variable in English language, but attainment in English literature has been very high. Students' attainment and progress in a number of key subjects, including the mathematics, music, science, information and communication technology, design and technology and the humanities have been very strong. Subjects are moving away from entering students early for GCSE to help ensure that students gain the highest grades.
- More-able students, including those designated as gifted and talented, make particularly good progress. They thrive because of the quality of specialist provision made for them, including in separate sciences. In an outstanding additional mathematics lesson before the start of the school day, students showed a high degree of cooperation in applying their knowledge and skills to plotting the gradients of graphs using a computer program.
- Students known to be eligible for support from the pupil premium, as well as groups including disabled students and those with special educational needs, have made less progress than other groups in recent years. Attendance and exclusion rates have also been less favourable for these groups. The success of specific programmes to support and accelerate the development of their literacy and other skills has not been monitored and evaluated with sufficient rigour, so that these programmes have had a limited impact for some students. While literacy standards are generally high across the school, for a small number of students by Year 11 weak writing skills remain a real constraint.
- The new leadership of the school's special educational needs provision is now taking a much more rigorous approach to ensuring that students most vulnerable to underachievement make the progress expected of them. During the inspection, disabled students and those with special educational needs were often observed making good progress with the well-judged support of teachers and teaching assistants who nurtured their independence and developed their confidence.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teachers manage their classes very well to ensure that lessons start very promptly and that students are actively and constructively engaged in learning throughout. Teachers generally use rewards effectively to motivate their students, although students report some inconsistencies between teachers in distributing merits.
- Teachers' planning of lessons is a key strength. As a result of a whole-school professional development programme, teachers think carefully about shaping a lesson to allow students not just to acquire knowledge but also to develop their thinking, along with their independent learning and collaborative skills.
- A standard lesson-planning pro forma is used by all teachers. It ensures that teachers consistently plan to develop students' literacy and/or numeracy skills, and, where possible to promote their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Students therefore regularly debate and reflect on moral and ethical issues, for example on industrial processes in science.
- Teachers are active in questioning students and checking their understanding as lessons proceed. Teachers are therefore quick to identify common misconceptions and to keep learning on track.
- Teachers' lesson plans show that they recognise the individual needs and capabilities of

students. There is some variation in the quality of planning to meet those needs. Teachers' expectations are often high and students respond very positively to the challenges they are set; but where expectations are too low, even the work of more-able students can become unclear and imprecise. While in many cases teachers now provide helpful support to those who find learning challenging, there are occasions when lessons move on too quickly before these students are ready.

- Homework is set regularly and supports learning effectively across the school. Some students, however, have difficulty in accessing some of the computer programs required to complete homework at home.
- There is much excellent practice in the marking of students' work to be seen in many subjects, including mathematics, information and communication technology, history, geography and art. Here, students receive highly specific information on how well they have done and what needs to be improved. Students often respond to this marking and are quick to identify their targets for improvement. Marking is less consistently helpful in some other subjects, however, including science and modern foreign languages.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Students, parents, carers and staff have highly positive views about students' behaviour.
- Students are unfailingly polite and helpful to visitors. They are excellent ambassadors for their school.
- Students have an excellent attitude to learning. They are punctual to lessons, and ready to learn as soon as they arrive. They are confident in contributing their views on a range of issues.
- Teachers manage students' behaviour very well, so that lessons are rarely disrupted by poor behaviour. There have been no permanent exclusions for many years, and fixed exclusions are low.
- Relationships between students of all backgrounds and heritages are very positive. Students collaborate very well together in lessons and in the very wide range of extra-curricular clubs and residential trips available to them.
- From the time they arrive in Year 7, students are taught how to recognise different forms of discrimination and bullying and how to guard against it. Students say they feel safe, and that in the rare instances of bullying, staff have taken effective action to prevent it.
- The school accords a high priority to students' safety, and risk assessments are systematically built into teachers' lesson planning. As a result, students have a well-developed understanding of how to keep themselves safe. Students who go off site for some of their provision in Key Stage 4 speak very positively about the good care they receive in their placements.
- Students develop excellent personal qualities by taking on a wide range of responsibilities for the smooth running and improvement of the school. For example, prefects help to ensure good order around the school. Students as observers visit lessons to offer feedback on lesson quality from a student's perspective. The student voice is widely heard in informing developments of the school through the school parliament and regular surveys of students' views.
- Attendance is better than average, but the rate of persistent absence is a little above average. The preponderance of persistent absence and the few fixed-term exclusions are among groups eligible for the pupil premium and disabled students or those with special educational needs. The school is working hard to engage with parents and carers to bring these numbers down, including by visits of the headteacher to family homes.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher has ensured that the school has remained successfully focused on promoting an ethos of mutual respect and cooperation while striving for high standards. The school is held

in high regard for its work by parents, carers and staff.

- A restructuring of the senior leadership team has strengthened the school's capacity to improve in key respects. The leadership of teaching has been particularly successful in improving lesson quality so that activities not only impart knowledge but also promote a range of important academic and life skills.
- The performance of staff in the classroom and that of leaders and managers is monitored rigorously and coherently against clear performance targets. The targets for staff are quality assured by the headteacher, and those of the headteacher by an external consultant. This ensures that they are suitably related to pupils' progress and to individual, departmental and whole-school priorities. Support structures, including opportunities to see practice in other schools, are put in place for staff whose performance falls short of expectations, and firm action is taken where performance does not respond. This system has made a marked contribution to improvements in teaching quality and rising standards over the last year. It has also been successful in helping to close gaps in performance between subjects.
- Across the school, senior and middle leaders are drawing on an increasingly useful flow of information to evaluate the quality of the school's provision. This includes: information from surveys of students, parents, carers and staff; observations of lessons and pupils' work; and records of pupils' progress. At whole-school and departmental level, leaders transparently identify shortcomings and plan improvement actions.
- The analysis of students' progress has, however, focused too much on end-of-school GCSE performance rather than 'drilling down' to look at how well specific groups of students are doing in earlier years. As a consequence, gaps in performance between some groups of students more vulnerable to weaker achievement and students-as-a-whole have persisted, thereby diminishing the school's otherwise strong drive to counter discrimination and promote equality of opportunity.
- The curriculum offers a very broad range of opportunities to students to help them pursue their interests and aspirations. Its breadth at Key Stage 4 is widened through the school's active collaboration with partner schools and colleges which enables students across the ability range to opt for specific academic or vocational courses in other settings. Success in these courses has boosted the number of qualifications obtained by students and contributed to improving overall rates of students remaining in employment, education or training post-16. The 'blocking' of time on the timetable to allow students to pursue these courses leads to some lessons in school being delivered in long double- or triple-periods, which can have an adverse impact on the continuity of students' learning in some subjects through the week.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is given a high priority in lessons, and promoted strongly through a very rich programme of extra-curricular clubs, activities and local, national and international visits. Students show initiative in organising and promoting activities themselves, such as the drama club which was putting on a very enjoyable pantomime during the inspection.

The governance of the school:

The governing body has developed its practices and procedures appropriately to reflect its direct responsibilities for the strategic leadership and direction of the academy. It has drawn effectively on external consultant support to develop its own practice in managing the performance of school leaders, and to deliver a range of services to support teaching and student welfare. Governors' committees are closely aligned to each of the school's key improvement priorities, helping to ensure that school improvement planning is increasingly coherent and that leaders are more sharply accountable for success. However, the criteria by which the success of actions is measured are not always sharp enough. For example, governors are asking increasingly searching questions about the impact of programmes supported by pupil premium funding, including support for pupils in target groups on transition from primary school and sustained support for their literacy and numeracy; but the responses they receive still too often refer to whole-school indicators rather than successes for the target group. The school's systems for the performance management of teachers ensure that governors receive regular summary reports

on teaching quality. The Chair of the Governing Body understands the school's strengths and areas for development well. Governors have a good balance of experience and expertise, and recognise the need for continued high-quality training to ensure that all governors can play a full and effective role. The governing body ensures that the safeguarding and the well-being of students and staff are given a high priority, and that safeguarding requirements are fully and rigorously met.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	137535
Inspection number	403704

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

Type of school	Academy converter
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	893
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jon Allen
Headteacher	Reverend Stephen Crabtree
Date of previous school inspection	NA
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