

Aylesford School – Sports College

Teapot Lane, Aylesford, Kent, ME20 7JU

Inspection dates

20–21 March 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Although GCSE results are improving, students' progress over time is not as good as it should be. Students enter the school with below average attainment and do not yet reach high enough standards by the end of Key Stage 4. This reflects the fact that achievement requires improvement.
- Students do not yet make the progress over time that they should in English and mathematics.
- Students eligible for the pupil premium do not yet make as much progress as other students at the school, including in English and mathematics.
- More able students do not always achieve the highest GCSE grades that they could.
- Although students' literacy skills are being developed well, students would benefit from more opportunities for extended writing.
- In a few lessons, the needs of students with special educational needs are not catered for as well as they could be and these students do not always make as much progress as they should.

The school has the following strengths

- The headteacher, supported by a committed senior leadership team and effective governing body, has worked determinedly to bring about improvements, including to the quality of teaching so that it is now good.
- The sixth form is good. Students make good progress, especially in vocational subjects.
- The quality of teaching is good and most students now make good progress in lessons. However, some lost ground needs to be made up for achievement over time to be good.
- Students are proud of their school. It provides a safe environment for learning and students behave well. They speak highly of the staff who work with them and who are very supportive of their learning.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 38 part lessons, several of which were jointly with senior leaders. Students’ work was also scrutinised during lessons. Inspectors also visited lessons and tutor time to see other aspects of the school’s work and spent time talking to students at break and lunch times.
- Meetings were held with four groups of students. Inspectors also met with four members of the governing body, a representative of the local authority and different groups of staff, including senior leaders and heads of department.
- Documentation relating to the work of the school, including information about students’ achievement, attendance, behaviour and safeguarding was also scrutinised.
- The views of 99 parents who responded to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View), along with 52 responses to the staff questionnaire, were analysed.

Inspection team

John Meinke, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Maggie Brady

Additional Inspector

Teresa Gilpin

Additional Inspector

Nigel Pressnell

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a slightly smaller than average-sized secondary school.
- About 15% of students are supported by the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for students known to be eligible for free school meals, those looked after by the local authority and those from service families. This proportion is below the national average.
- Most students are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of students supported at school action is in line with the national average. The proportion supported at school action plus, or by a statement of special educational needs, is below average.
- About 40 students attend courses at Mid Kent College as part of their Key Stage 4 curriculum.
- At the time of the previous inspection, the school's sixth form was part of a consortium with three other local schools. This consortium is now being disbanded.
- The school has specialist status as a sports college.
- The school meets the current government floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further improve the quality of teaching to enable students to make consistently good or better progress in all lessons by:
 - ensuring that all teachers plan activities which are at the right level of difficulty for all learners, including fully supporting the needs of students with special educational needs
 - improving the quality of questioning across the school so that it is as good as in the best lessons, where it deepens students' learning and stretches the most able
 - continuing to develop literacy across the school, including providing more opportunities for extended writing.
- Ensure that the good progress now made by most students in lessons is sustained so that achievement over time is good, particularly by:
 - ensuring that students make good progress in English and mathematics
 - closing the gap so that the attainment of students eligible for the pupil premium is at least in line with that of their peers
 - increasing the progress of the most able students so that more of them achieve the highest grades.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils requires improvement

- Students enter Year 7 with attainment that is below average in English and mathematics. While there have been improvements in achievement, the overall progress made by students by the end of Year 11 in 2012 was not as good as it should have been. Achievement, therefore, requires improvement. While most parents who responded to the on-line questionnaire agreed that their child makes good progress, a small minority felt that it could be better.
- There have been significant improvements to the quality of teaching since the previous inspection so that it is now good, including for English and mathematics. Specific actions have been taken since the previous inspection to improve teaching in English and mathematics, including the appointment of additional staff. Observations and analysis of school information during the inspection indicate that most students now make good progress in lessons in these subjects. However, students have not yet made up for ground lost where teaching has been less effective in the past.
- Students are set challenging targets which are rigorously monitored by school leaders. The increased rigour of this monitoring along with recent improvements to the quality of teaching are yet to have their full impact on students' achievement. School leaders are able to demonstrate that achievement in Year 11 is continuing to improve in 2013. This analysis is based on current assessment information. Lesson observations and scrutiny of students' work indicate that rates of progress and attainment are rising for students currently in the school.
- Students who entered Year 7 with above average attainment do not yet make the progress they should, particularly in English. Senior leaders have now reviewed the use of early entry for GCSE examinations so that these are used much less frequently, particularly for the more able, in order to ensure that students reach the highest grades. Expectations of what these students can achieve have also been raised, with more challenging targets set for them.
- The average point scores attained by students at the end of Year 11 indicate that in 2012, students eligible for the pupil premium were almost one GCSE grade in English and two thirds of a grade in mathematics behind other students at the school. This gap has increased from 2011. Use of pupil premium and Year 7 catch-up funding has been evaluated and reviewed in order to maximise their impact and these are now being used to fund additional staffing in English, mathematics and science. Observations made by inspectors indicate that this is having a positive impact on the progress made by eligible students. The school's tracking shows that students eligible for the pupil premium in the current Year 11 are on track to close the gap in both English and mathematics.
- Students with special educational needs have not made the progress they should have made in previous years. Rigorous monitoring, combined with evaluation of support provided, now means that variations in the progress made by this group of students are being reduced and their achievement is improving.
- Students in the sixth form make good progress, especially in vocational subjects. The newly appointed head of sixth form has introduced more challenging target setting and closer monitoring of progress. Observations of sixth form lessons during the inspection indicate that students are given good opportunities to develop good study skills and self-confidence.
- Observations undertaken during the inspection indicate that students are enthusiastic about their learning and engage well with activities, taking an obvious pride in their work. This makes a strong contribution to their progress during lessons.
- About 40 students in Key Stage 4 attend courses at a local college. This enables them to study vocational courses which are not offered at the school. School leaders carefully monitor the quality of teaching and progress made by students who follow these courses to ensure that they achieve well.

The quality of teaching**is good**

- The quality of teaching has improved since the previous inspection so that it is typically at least good, and, in some cases, it is outstanding. Discussions with students indicate that they feel teaching is now good and they enjoy their lessons. Most parents who responded to the on-line questionnaire agreed that their child is taught well at the school. Improvement has been brought about by school leaders holding teachers firmly to account for the quality of their teaching and the progress of students in their classes. However, this improvement has yet to have a full impact on the overall achievement of students and be reflected in GCSE examination results.
- Teachers use their subject knowledge and information about students' abilities to expertly plan lessons with activities that engage students. Teachers check students' understanding regularly during lessons, changing activities when needed. Questioning is used well to challenge students and deepen their understanding. However, on a few occasions, teachers accept simple answers too quickly and miss opportunities to probe students' understanding. Students are keen to learn and discuss their work willingly and with confidence.
- Students report that staff are helpful and good relationships between students and adults contribute to a very positive climate for learning. This enables students to talk about their learning, share ideas and take risks. For example, in a Year 8 English lesson, students spoke confidently and enthusiastically about their interpretations of two poems. Literacy across all subjects is being developed well through effective use of technical words, leading to an expansion of students' vocabulary. However, sometimes opportunities are missed to further develop literacy. For example, there are insufficient opportunities for students, particularly the most able, to engage in activities which involve extended writing.
- In the best lessons, teachers have high expectations of what students can achieve and they plan varied activities to engage learners. Lessons proceed with a brisk pace, with regular checking of understanding and correction of mistakes. Students are aware of what they need to do to be successful and take responsibility for their learning. For example, in an outstanding Year 10 physical education lesson, the teacher ensured that students were fully aware of what they needed to do to be successful. Students were able to assess their own performance as well as that of their peers and to make improvements. The teacher used questioning well to deepen their understanding and to challenge students to do even better. This practice is not seen in a few lessons that require improvement.
- Provision in lessons for students with special educational needs has improved and is now enabling them to make better progress. The planned use of teaching assistants is increasingly effective in supporting learning. Inspectors observed a number of lessons where teaching assistants had a clear role in leading aspects of students' learning. Teaching assistants promote independence by encouraging students to think and write for themselves. Sometimes, however, the use of teaching assistants is less well planned and they do too much for the students they are supporting. On occasions, activities are not well explained by the teacher or sufficiently structured for some students to be able to understand what they need to do.
- Students take a pride in their work and the presentation and quality of written work is good. Books are regularly marked with good written feedback which informs students of how to improve their learning further. A small minority of parents who responded to the on-line questionnaire raised concerns that homework set did not always support their child's learning appropriately. Inspectors' observations and discussions with students indicate that appropriate homework is regularly set to extend learning.

The behaviour and safety of pupils**are good**

- Students are proud of their school and comment on how well everyone gets on. Students say that they feel safe and most parents who responded to the on-line questionnaire agreed. Students are polite and welcoming to visitors.
- The school's behaviour policy is clearly communicated across the school and applied consistently by staff. This makes a strong contribution to students' good behaviour both in and outside of

lessons. Discussions with students indicate that the good behaviour seen during the inspection is typical of that found over time. School records show that behaviour is improving over time and that exclusion rates have significantly decreased. This is due to better provision and support for students at risk of exclusion. Inspectors did, however, note occasional lapses in behaviour when the behaviour policy was not applied consistently.

- The school demonstrates a strong commitment to the development of the whole child. There is a very effective pastoral team which ensures that students are well cared for. The vertical mentoring system, where students are placed in mixed-age tutor groups, encourages students of different ages and background to mix together harmoniously.
- Discussions with students indicate that incidences of bullying are few and are dealt with well by the school when they do happen. The large majority of parents who responded to the on-line questionnaire agreed with this. Students are well aware of the different types of bullying, including cyber bullying, and they know how to keep themselves and others safe in and out of school.
- Effective strategies, including detailed monitoring and the development of home-school links, have been used to improve attendance and students are punctual to both school and their lessons.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher has worked determinedly to bring about improvement and there is a shared commitment both by school leaders and the governing body that all students should achieve their best. Since the previous inspection, the leadership team has been strengthened by new appointments which have led to improvements in the quality of teaching and accelerated progress by students.
- There has been a strong focus on monitoring students' achievement and improving the quality of teaching. Heads of department take more responsibility for driving improvement and all teachers are rigorously held to account for the progress of students in their classes.
- The leadership of teaching is good. Effective action has been taken to eradicate weak teaching. Teachers are supported by a range of training opportunities, including coaching programmes, many of which are targeted to individual need. Performance management is robust and teachers' progression through salary scales is linked to the quality of teaching and the achievement of students in their classes.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced and meets the needs of learners well. It is currently under review to ensure that it meets the future needs of learners, including increasing the number of academic courses offered in Key Stages 4 and 5. A new whole-school literacy policy is contributing to improvements in this area across the school. Specialist status as a sports college has had a significant impact on the school through increasing students' participation in clubs and other activities and developing an appropriate vocational curriculum. Students are being better prepared for the next stages in their education, employment and training and very few leave the school without a known destination.
- There are very good opportunities for the development of students' social, moral, spiritual and social development. The personal, social and health education programme makes a strong contribution to students' development. Students are given opportunities to explore other cultures and there is a well-developed international link to a school in Zambia.
- Equality of opportunity is promoted and all forms of discrimination tackled. Safeguarding and child protection procedures fully meet current requirements. The school takes reasonable steps to ensure that students attend, behave and are safe when attending Mid Kent College.
- The local authority provides a good level of support for the school. The school actively seeks external review and validation. The school is well placed to improve further.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body has an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school, including the quality of teaching. The governors support and challenge the

headteacher and other leaders to improve the school further and scrutinise information about students' achievement carefully, comparing it with national figures. They monitor the use of pupil premium funding carefully to ensure that it has the maximum impact. The governing body ensures that performance management is used fairly and that teachers are rewarded only for meeting classroom targets. Governors have a firm grip on the school's budget and plan carefully to ensure financial sustainability.

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	118882
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	405823

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Foundation School
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	932
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	86
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Peter Divall
Headteacher	Doug Lawson
Date of previous school inspection	30 September–1 October 2010
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