

Amersham School

Stanley Hill, Amersham, Buckinghamshire HP7 9HH

Inspection dates

15–16 March

Overall effectiveness

Good

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
16 to 19 study programmes	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The headteacher has sustained a clear vision and sense of direction. Governors and staff across the school are on board and committed to the school's continued improvement.
- The headteacher has recently appointed senior and middle leaders who have strengthened the effectiveness of leadership and teaching.
- The governing body's wider membership allows it to monitor the school more effectively.
- Pupils enter the school with prior attainment that is broadly average. Outcomes by the end of Year 11 are above national averages.
- Pupils are making good progress in most subjects in the school.
- Pupils who are eligible for pupil premium funding and pupils with special educational needs or disability are now making progress similar to their peers.
- Teaching is effective and teachers plan interesting and enjoyable lessons. Their subject knowledge is good and this contributes to strong engagement by pupils.
- There is a harmonious atmosphere around the school and behaviour is good. Pupils are keen to come to school and attendance is above average.
- Teachers know their pupils well. Strong relationships between staff and pupils help to keep pupils safe, promote pupils' personal development and raise their achievement.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Learners in the sixth form make significantly less progress in academic subjects than in work-related qualifications and this area of the school's work requires improvement.
- Although boys made good progress overall, their progress and attainment lag behind that of girls. Strategies the school is employing to narrow this gap are yet to have a significant impact.
- Leaders do not consistently evaluate the impact of actions taken to improve pupils' progress.
- There are still a few inconsistencies in teaching so not all pupils are challenged enough in the classroom to do their best, in particular the most-able pupils.
- The curriculum does not enable pupils to achieve the highest grades in some subjects.
- Procedures for recording information about safeguarding are not systematic.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further raise the achievement of pupils across the school, particularly the most able and boys, and that of all learners in the sixth form.
- Reduce inconsistency in the quality of teaching by ensuring that teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve and challenge them to think deeply.
- Review the curriculum model to ensure that more pupils are able to achieve the highest grades.
- Strengthen leadership and governance further by:
 - ensuring rigorous evaluation of actions taken to improve the school
 - developing a clear strategy to tackle the underperformance of academic subjects in the sixth form.
- Strengthen arrangements for safeguarding by systematically recording all relevant information about pupils and cataloguing work with external agencies.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The headteacher's commitment and enthusiasm are infectious. Staff morale and relationships within the school are very positive. All of the staff who completed a survey as part of the inspection overwhelmingly support the school's leaders and feel proud to work at the school. The headteacher's clear vision for high standards within a caring community is well understood. Nearly nine out of 10 parents who responded to Parent View would recommend the school to other parents.
- Changes to the leadership team have strengthened the capacity to secure further improvements. Leaders have a good grasp of the school's strengths and areas for further improvement. Leadership of the core subjects of English, mathematics and science is strong. The science subject leader has reorganised the curriculum to meet pupils' needs better. Changes to the leadership of both design and information technology have taken place in order to improve progress in these subjects. These changes have had a positive effect in a short time, but it is too soon to evaluate their full impact.
- Leaders have strengthened the school's systems for measuring how well pupils are learning. Heads of year check progress information regularly and identify underachievement swiftly. This is helping leaders to target extra help for subjects and groups of pupils more quickly than in the past. However, some pupils' targets are set too low and as a result, underachievement by some most-able and disadvantaged pupils is not being closely monitored. Leaders have recognised the need to raise expectations and are currently revising their target-setting processes. Their current focus on raising boys' achievement has not yet had the desired impact.
- Throughout the school, leaders are working hard to drive improvement. However, their monitoring is not consistently sharp enough to identify the impact of strategies to improve teaching and learning nor indicate whether these are applied consistently to secure rapid improvement in all subjects. For instance, teachers and pupils respond to feedback in accordance with the school's policy in some subjects, but not all. Work remains to be done to establish consistency in this area.
- Additional government funding to support disadvantaged pupils is being used effectively to close the gap by the end of Key Stage 4. Leaders have recently introduced a range of strategies to accelerate the progress of these pupils, which are beginning to show impact.
- The school's training programme for staff is well targeted to meet the school's priorities for improvement. Staff feel well supported and appreciate the range of professional development opportunities. However, leaders do not always evaluate the impact of training provided on pupils' progress.
- The school's curriculum is broad and balanced and offers a wide range of subjects to all pupils in Key Stage 4. The school's curriculum is designed carefully to help build pupils' confidence and spread the timescale of examinations. Pupils start Key Stage 4 in Year 9 and sit examinations in several subjects at the end of Year 10. Pupils then choose three more subjects to study in one year during Year 11. Leaders have acknowledged that taking examinations early or completing courses in one year may be limiting achievement at the higher levels and they are monitoring progress carefully. In addition, they are making some revisions, including delaying examinations in mathematics to the end of Year 11. The curriculum is under constant review to ensure that it meets the needs of boys and the most-able pupils.
- The curriculum is enriched by a wide range of extra-curricular activities, including competitions, sporting and cultural activities and clubs that are well attended by pupils. Pupils spoke with enthusiasm about the enrichment activities available, particularly the sports clubs.
- The school works very effectively to ensure that all pupils feel included. It makes very good provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils show high levels of respect and concern for each other. British values are promoted through assemblies and the school's personal, social, health and economic education curriculum. There is a flourishing school council, which helps pupils understand democracy and provides opportunities for them to take on responsibilities. For example, school council members have had additional training in e-safety, beyond that provided for all pupils, so that they can help advise other pupils. Many pupils in the school participate in fund-raising activities for charities, and these events are often led by older pupils and sixth-form learners.
- The school provides impartial information, advice and guidance to help pupils choose appropriate courses when they move on to the next stage of their education. Almost all pupils go on to education, training or employment.
- The local authority's representative provides support for the school to narrow the gap for disadvantaged pupils. However, the level of challenge to school leaders lacks rigour.

■ The governance of the school

- Governors fully share the headteacher's vision for Amersham School and they care deeply about each pupil that belongs to the school. They understand the school's strengths and weaknesses because of detailed and accurate information provided by the headteacher.
- Governors are involved in setting the school's strategic direction and play a part in monitoring the school's progress through increasingly frequent visits to the school. The governing body has recently been strengthened by the addition of personnel with helpful expertise. However, due to a lack of robust external evaluation, governors do not always hold senior leaders to account as rigorously as they might.
- Governors have ensured that pay increases for teachers are only awarded when the achievement of pupils is good. However, governors have been slow to ensure that the school meets all statutory responsibilities. They have not monitored carefully some safeguarding procedures or followed up closely the impact of pupil premium and Year 7 catch-up funding.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective and pupils feel safe in the school. Staff, who know pupils well, are quick to report any concerns they have about children in the school. These concerns are acted upon in a timely way and appropriate referrals are made to other agencies. However, notes of actions taken and next steps required are not recorded in a systematic way.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is improving and this has helped to drive up pupils' achievement. Clear routines and strong relationships between staff and pupils build high levels of trust and confidence so that pupils are absorbed in their learning. Pupils in all year groups listen carefully to each other to help solve problems. The atmosphere is usually purposeful and focused on learning.
- Teachers have strong subject knowledge and expect pupils to participate fully. Teachers set tasks that are designed to engage pupils. For example, in English, a fascinating discussion about motivation was used to develop understanding of Banquo's actions in *Macbeth*. Where teaching leads to good or better achievement, skilful questioning encourages pupils to deepen their learning. In many lessons, including in mathematics and English, pupils are attentive because the work is stimulating, interesting and well structured.
- Teachers do not consistently have high enough expectations or set work at an appropriate level for pupils. The school expects all pupils to make steady or 'expected' progress in all subjects, and this sometimes lowers the determination by pupils to make good or 'more than expected' progress. Across the curriculum, sometimes the most-able pupils have to complete work at lower levels before going on to more challenging tasks and so do not make as much progress as they are capable of. Some written work shows that pupils, especially boys, are not always required to present work well and explain ideas accurately. These lower expectations are limiting the outcomes of some pupils, particularly the most able and some boys.
- There are examples of very effective teacher feedback to pupils in line with the school's expectations. In these instances, pupils clearly understand what they have to do to improve and act upon this feedback. However, there are instances when pupils do not respond or are not clear enough about how well they are doing and how to improve because feedback is not precise enough. These inconsistencies exist across and within departments.
- Teaching assistants, in lessons, make an effective contribution to supporting pupils' progress. Their questioning techniques skilfully support and challenge pupils' thinking and learning and they encourage independence. Many teaching assistants provide additional support for pupils with special educational needs or disability in small groups outside lessons and the school's performance information shows that the achievement of these pupils is rising.
- Homework is set in line with the school's policy and is used to extend learning.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.

- The school is a happy place. The majority of pupils enjoy learning and show pride in their school. Generally, pupils take pride in their work, but some boys' work is poorly presented and staff do not always challenge this.
- Pupils take on responsibilities enthusiastically and enjoy contributing to school life. Members of the school council aim to involve many pupils in their drive to improve the school further.
- A very large majority of parents agree that their children enjoy school and feel safe.
- Pupils told inspectors that they feel safe in school and know whom to turn to if they have a concern. Leaders make sure that vulnerable pupils receive the right emotional and practical guidance and support. The school counsellor fulfils this role very well.
- Pupils have been well trained and are very clear about how to avoid danger when using the internet. There are no problems with racism and derogatory language is rarely used. If bullying does occur, it is always dealt with promptly by staff.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils are polite and respectful to each other, staff and visitors and forge strongly positive relationships with their teachers and each other.
- The behaviour in lessons and around the school is good. Pupils are punctual and come to lessons well equipped and ready to learn. The vast majority of pupils are keen and attentive in class and disruption is rare. Occasionally, when teaching lacks challenge, some pupils' attention wanes and they lose concentration.
- Attendance is above national levels.

Outcomes for pupils

are good

- Typically, pupils start Year 7 with attainment at or a little lower than national averages. In the 2015 examinations, the proportion of Year 11 pupils attaining the important standard of five A*–C GCSE grades, including in English and mathematics, was above the national average. Current information collected by the school about pupils' progress, along with work seen during the inspection, shows that outcomes are continuing to improve.
- Pupils take GCSE examinations in mathematics, science and many other subjects at the end of Year 10. They have previously taken science at the end of Year 9, although this practice has now ceased. Some pupils improve their grades by retaking their science and mathematics examinations at the end of Year 11. All pupils sit GCSE examinations in further subjects at the end of Year 11. Published results, which show the grades obtained at the first sitting, do not reflect the final outcomes of the pupils at the school.
- In 2015, there was a healthy proportion of good grades in a range of subjects including mathematics, English language and literature, art, photography, travel and tourism, and health and social care. Achievement in science, modern foreign languages, design technology and information technology was lower. Work seen by inspectors shows that effective actions taken have started to bring about improvements in these subjects. The GCSE examination results for science already taken by current Year 11 pupils show improved outcomes.
- There were fewer A* and A grades achieved because the most-able pupils did not quite make as much progress as they should have in some subjects, including drama and history. Work produced by some Year 10 pupils in GCSE subjects they are completing this summer lacks the depth of understanding required for pupils to reach the highest grades. The most-able pupils make good progress in many subjects, but this is not consistent because sometimes there is a lack of challenge.
- Outcomes achieved by disadvantaged pupils improved in 2015. Through re-taking examinations in mathematics in 2015, some disadvantaged pupils improved their grades by the end of Year 11. As a result, the gaps between the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and that of others nationally have narrowed, but are still about one grade below in both English and mathematics. Current gaps are continuing to reduce because of the focus on ensuring that these pupils receive extra help and support, which is leading to accelerated progress.
- Pupils with special educational needs or disability are supported well and make the same progress as others in the school.

- Boys throughout the school achieve less well than girls. By the end of Year 11, in 2015, girls made significantly more progress than boys. Steps are being taken to address this, and boys in an all-male Year 11 English group are now making rapid progress. However, standards of work expected of boys are inconsistent.
- The school's work to develop pupils' reading is effective. Pupils were keen to discuss their book choice with inspectors during their regular tutor time reading session. Year 7 pupils who need to catch up are paired with Year 11 pupils to encourage them to read more widely. This is part of an effective programme of intervention to help Year 7 pupils who enter the school below national levels expected for their age.
- Pupils are well prepared for progression in their next stage of life in work or education. All pupils who left the school in 2015 were enrolled on education or training courses or obtained jobs with training for September 2015. About a third stay on in the school's sixth form.

16 to 19 study programmes

require improvement

- The school meets both the academic and vocational minimum standards. However, too few learners make good progress over their time in the sixth form. Learners studying academic-level courses make significantly less progress than those studying vocational courses. Low outcomes by learners explain why the sixth form requires improvement.
- Senior leaders have recognised the need to improve the sixth form. They have raised the entry requirements for academic subjects and adjusted the curriculum offer to extend the vocational courses. However, leaders responsible for the strategic development of the sixth form are not fully effective in bringing about improvement as they do not have a clear strategy for improving the achievement of current learners, especially in Year 13.
- The 16–19 study programme offers learners the opportunity to combine academic and vocational courses with an extended project and a programme of individual development. Learners who have not yet achieved English and mathematics at GCSE are supported and follow an effective programme of study to improve their understanding further.
- The head of sixth form, who is responsible for the day-to-day running of the sixth form, carefully tracks learners' progress and identifies those who are in danger of falling behind. She works with subject teachers and tutors to support individual academic and pastoral needs. This is beginning to help current learners, especially those in Year 12, to make better progress.
- Teaching in the sixth form is improving. It is strongest when teachers have high expectations of learners and use every opportunity to extend learners' levels of expertise. Some teachers set challenging questions and skilfully use learners' responses to create useful model answers.
- Learners enjoy the sixth form. They are attentive in lessons and conduct themselves very well around the school. They provide excellent role models for younger pupils. Learners are mature, feel safe and reflect sensitively on social and moral issues. Learners are very involved in the broader life of the school. Many use their non-contact time to support lower-school lessons, run the school council and contribute to student leadership programmes.
- The school has an effective programme of careers guidance which incorporates a virtual programme of business mentoring, coaching and apprenticeship opportunities. Learners receive careers guidance on next steps, which include university, apprenticeships and job opportunities. All learners who left the school in 2015 went on to sustained destinations. The school offers work experience as part of the curriculum, but as this occurs during the school day, many choose not to incorporate this into their learning experience.
- The head of sixth form and her team ensure that all learners are cared for and nurtured. The leader makes sure that learners in difficulty receive support and counselling. There is a pastoral programme that includes aspects of living in modern Britain, being aware of other cultures and developing an understanding of being a responsible citizen.

School details

Unique reference number	137343
Local authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	10001545

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	821
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	95
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Nigel Davies
Headteacher	Sharon Jarrett
Telephone number	01494 726562
Website	www.amershamschool.org.uk
Email address	office@amershamschool.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	2–3 March 2011

Information about this school

- Amersham School is slightly smaller than the average-sized 11–18 school.
- The school converted to an academy on 1 September 2011. When the predecessor school, of the same name, was inspected by Ofsted in March 2011, it was judged to be good.
- The proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged and supported by the pupil premium (funding for those pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and for looked after children) is below average.
- A lower than average number of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is lower than average.
- The proportion of pupils who receive support for special educational needs or disability is well below average, but the proportion who have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan is above average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 38 lessons, 27 of them jointly with school leaders. The lead inspector also visited nine classes with the headteacher.
- Meetings were held with pupils, the headteacher, senior and middle leaders, newly appointed staff, the Chair of the Governing Body and four other governors and a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors looked at a range of pupils' work, and observed pupils' behaviour in lessons, around the school and at lunchtime. They also talked informally with staff and pupils.
- Inspectors considered the views of parents, taking into account the 105 responses on the online questionnaire, Parent View. Inspectors also considered the 79 free-text responses and two phone calls from parents.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documents, including those associated with safeguarding, behaviour and attendance, progress information on current pupils, minutes of meetings of the governing body, the school's evaluation of its own performance, and improvement plans.

Inspection team

Theresa Phillips, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Caroline Walshe	Ofsted Inspector
Peter Barnes	Ofsted Inspector
Martin Brown	Ofsted Inspector
Peter Rodin	Ofsted Inspector
James Rouse	Ofsted Inspector

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Raising concerns and making a complaint about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.gov.uk/government/publications/complaints-about-ofsted. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.



You can use Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school. Ofsted will use the information parents and carers provide when deciding which schools to inspect and when and as part of the inspection.

You can also use Parent View to find out what other parents and carers think about schools in England. You can visit www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk, or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

© Crown copyright 2016

