

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mr Duncan Spalding
Executive Headteacher
Aylsham High School
Sir Williams Lane
Aylsham
Norwich
Norfolk
NR11 6AN

Dear Mr Spalding

Short inspection of Aylsham High School

Following my visit to the school on 16 May 2018 with John Wilson, Ofsted Inspector, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be good in October 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

You provide strong, thoughtful and well-focused leadership. You are guided by your desire to provide pupils, staff and the wider community with an effective, values-driven school. You are passionate about your long-term vision for the development of education in Aylsham. You communicate this vision effectively and your improvement plans support you and your staff as you work towards your goals. Your commitment to professional development is strong and it is valued by your staff. They agree that they are well led and well trained, and that you have created a climate in which they are trusted to take risks and to innovate. As a consequence, you are continuing to improve the quality of education that you provide for your pupils.

Pupils continue to demonstrate the positive behaviour and attitudes to learning that were noted in your last inspection. They are friendly, welcoming and polite; they enjoy learning and they get on well with their teachers and other adults who work at the school. One pupil said: 'I come out of school feeling happy because of the relationships that I have built with teachers and friends in all year groups.' Pupils are grateful for the wide range of extra-curricular activities that are available to them. They value the role they play in the life of the school, for example as members of the anti-bullying group Friendly Faces. Staff are also grateful for the way in which their views are listened to and the extent to which they are involved in decision making. All of the staff who completed the Ofsted questionnaire agreed

that they are proud to work at the school. An overwhelming majority of parents and carers who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, would recommend the school to other parents.

You have a clear and accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Your priorities for improvement are appropriate and leaders understand what is expected of them. Attainment at key stage 4 continues to be high, and pupils' overall progress remains strong. Your focus on the core knowledge that pupils require to be successful across the curriculum has driven your approaches to assessment. Middle leaders have developed a clear understanding of how pupils progress in their different subjects; they use this to assess pupils and to offer them helpful advice in order to make further improvements.

Governors provide you with effective support and challenge; they too know the school well and they are passionate about its continued improvement. Governors support the school's development through their contributions at committee meetings and during their visits to meet leaders, staff and pupils. Both you and governors are in agreement over the actions required to continue the school's improvement; these include further improving pupils' progress in modern foreign languages and reducing the absence of disadvantaged pupils.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose.

Leaders' systems for reporting safeguarding concerns are effective. Safeguarding records are well kept and any child protection referrals are monitored robustly. Leaders undertake all appropriate checks on staff and these records are scrutinised on a regular basis by nominated members of the governing body. Governors have a clear understanding of their safeguarding duties and they are effective in carrying them out. Staff are well trained and they know how to identify any signs that pupils are at risk; they are quick to respond to any safeguarding concerns and they say that safeguarding is a part of the school's culture.

Pupils say they are safe at school; staff, and the overwhelming majority of parents who responded to Parent View, agree. Pupils say that, on the rare occasions it happens, bullying is dealt with swiftly and effectively. The roles that pupils undertake, such as 'peer coaches' and 'peace makers', enhance the effectiveness of leaders' systems. Pupils are taught how to stay safe through assemblies, tutor time and longer sessions that cover topics such as sex and relationships education, road safety and e-safety. They value the high levels of staff supervision throughout the school day.

Inspection findings

- We pursued a number of lines of enquiry to ascertain whether the school continues to be good. Our first question related to the impact that leaders are having on the progress of pupils who study modern foreign languages. The new

leader of modern foreign languages provides strong leadership. She has developed a new and more effective curriculum and is providing teachers with a wide range of resources to support pupils' learning and development. A new assessment system has been created and the department now has detailed and appropriate improvement plans. Improvements have been further supported by changes to staffing and to the range of GCSE courses on offer to pupils.

- As a result of leaders' actions, pupils are more positive about studying languages; they say teaching has improved and that they are more confident in lessons. Improvements are also evident in lessons themselves. For example, strong relationships with teachers mean that pupils take risks and answer questions when they are unsure; this clarifies misconceptions and deepens their understanding. In addition, pupils demonstrate resilience and refer to their 'core knowledge' booklets before asking for help. Leaders' records of assessments also provide evidence of improvements. Year 10 pupils are currently attaining at a higher level than in previous years, while many pupils in key stage 3 are now making the progress that is expected of them.
- Leaders acknowledge that improvements are still ongoing. The new curriculum and assessment system is not consistently embedded, while the quality of work in pupils' workbooks is not as high as that seen in other subjects across the school. Leaders' assessment records also demonstrate that more needs to be done to ensure that pupils make greater progress, especially towards the higher levels of attainment.
- A second line of enquiry related to the impact of leaders' actions to improve the progress, behaviour and attendance of disadvantaged pupils. Leaders appropriately identify the barriers to learning that affect disadvantaged pupils' progress. They track progress carefully and ensure that plans are put in place for disadvantaged pupils if they fall behind. Support is provided to pupils based upon their individual need. For example, some pupils are invited to attend small-group support during tutor time, while others receive additional tuition in English and mathematics.
- Disadvantaged pupils are positive about their experiences at school. They say that they enjoy learning and that they are making good progress. This is supported by pupils' workbooks and leaders' assessment records; both indicate that disadvantaged pupils are making good progress over time and that there is little difference between their progress and that of their non-disadvantaged classmates.
- Leaders' actions to improve the behaviour of disadvantaged pupils are effective. Leaders' systems ensure that behaviour is of a high standard throughout the day and they offer a range of support to pupils whose behaviour can be challenging. As a consequence, the behaviour of disadvantaged pupils has improved and the proportion of disadvantaged pupils receiving fixed-period exclusions is well below average. The impact of leaders' actions to reduce the absence of disadvantaged pupils is less consistent. There has been a significant reduction in the proportion of disadvantaged pupils who are persistently absent from school. However, the overall absence of disadvantaged pupils has risen and remains above average.
- Finally, we wanted to check the extent to which leaders ensure that all pupils

continue to make strong progress in science. Leadership in this area is of a very high standard. The leader of science has a clear understanding of the strengths in her department. She focuses on supporting teachers to continuously improve; she is also tenacious in ensuring that pupils receive support, both in and out of lessons, that is closely tailored to their areas of need. Teachers are robustly held to account in an atmosphere of support and collaboration.

- The team of science teachers is highly effective. They develop relationships with pupils, built on mutual trust, that are the cornerstone of their effective classroom practice. Pupils enjoy studying science; they are appropriately challenged and supported and their attitudes to learning are excellent. As a consequence, pupils make significant progress over time.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they develop and embed recent changes in order to further improve pupils' progress in modern foreign languages
- they reduce the differences in the rates of absence between disadvantaged pupils and all pupils nationally.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of governors, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Norfolk. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Daniel Gee
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, inspectors met with you, school leaders, other school staff, governors and groups of pupils. Together with you and other school leaders, we made short visits to a range of classes to observe teaching, look at pupils' books and to see pupils at work. In addition, we reviewed a sample of pupils' workbooks. We scrutinised the school's evaluation of its own effectiveness, its development plan and other documentation, including the record of pre-employment checks and child protection records. We also considered the 118 responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View, alongside the 72 responses from staff and the 54 responses from pupils to the Ofsted questionnaires.