

Inspection of Aylesford School

Teapot Lane, Aylesford, Kent ME20 7JU

Inspection dates: 3–4 March 2020

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Sixth-form provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Requires improvement

What is it like to attend this school?

Aylesford School has a warm and welcoming atmosphere. Overall, pupils are happy and enjoy coming to school. They feel safe and well supported by staff. The relationships between staff and pupils are strong. Pupils told us that they trust that adults will swiftly sort out the few incidents of bullying that may occur. Leaders have created a calm and orderly environment around the school.

Leaders have high expectations of pupils. They are ambitious for pupils to develop 'strong character strengths and reach their academic potential'. This has improved pupils' attitudes and raised their aspirations. One parent commented, 'The character education means he can demonstrate real success as a rounded individual, not just academically.' The school promotes tolerance and diversity. Pupils' physical and mental health are well supported by staff. Pupils, staff and parents and carers acknowledge that behaviour has improved hugely.

Standards have risen in most subjects at GCSE. Pupils are expected to work hard in lessons. As one parent commented, 'The support for my child is amazing. It is centred on what is best for him.'

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Since the last inspection, leaders have successfully improved all aspects of the school. They know the school well and have tackled weaknesses effectively. Leaders have a strong focus on building character education. This has transformed pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning. Pupils approach their learning positively, including those who have joined the school in-year.

Subject leaders plan curriculum content to build pupils' learning over time. They continue to refine their curriculum planning so that learning is carefully sequenced. As a result, pupils learn and remember more. Pupils study a range of subjects. As a result, more are sitting examinations in English Baccalaureate (EBacc) subjects. However, curriculum plans are not yet implemented consistently across all subjects. In a small number of subjects, teachers' planning for pupils' learning does not challenge pupils well enough. Pupils have not always learned what they need to know for the work that comes later.

Teachers' subject knowledge is strong. They present ideas clearly to all pupils. This includes those pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Teachers adapt learning and provide suitable resources for pupils with SEND so that these pupils learn effectively.

Leaders have introduced assessment methods that are effective and do not overload staff. For example, the 'level up' activities challenge pupils and support them to improve their work. In most subjects, teachers skilfully check pupils' understanding and make them think deeply in lessons. In a small number of subjects, teachers do

not always check well enough that pupils have learned and remembered important information.

Students in the sixth form attain highly in their learning. Leaders ensure that the curriculum is inclusive and that it effectively meets the needs of the learners. Leaders ensure that students have independent careers advice. This enables them to make sensible choices for their journey after leaving school. Sixth-form students are keen to take on responsibilities, such as buddying younger pupils. This helps to develop their leadership skills.

The school has high expectations for behaviour. Adults apply agreed strategies consistently and fairly. A focus on building relationships has led to mutual respect between staff and pupils. There has been a significant improvement in behaviour and attendance. Consequently, attitudes to learning are largely positive. Pupils show resilience in lessons and they are keen to attempt challenging tasks. Pupils value the relationship they have with staff and say that it is a strength of the school.

Leaders support pupils well in their personal development. Pupils are proud of the improvements they have made through the work of the school council and the leadership skills they are developing. Leaders prepare pupils well for life in modern Britain through character education. Pupils have opportunities to discuss and debate topical issues. As a result, they understand and show respect for other cultures and their beliefs. Staff have significantly increased the extra-curricular opportunities available to pupils. For example, pupils visit overseas countries and support the community by working with the British Legion.

Governors have clear expectations of what they want for pupils. They hold leaders to account well. Governors closely check the school's finances. They ensure that disadvantaged pupils are supported well. Staff are overwhelmingly pleased and supportive of the changes leaders have made. They value the learning development opportunities to work with staff in other schools. This enables them to develop their professional skills.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Governors and leaders have created a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. Appropriate checks are made to ensure that staff are suitable to work in school. Staff understand their responsibilities and they know how to keep pupils safe. When extra help is needed, safeguarding leaders contact the right people in other organisations, such as social services. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe online and they understand the risks from extremism. Pupils feel very well supported by adults in the school.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In a few subjects, curriculum planning has not been strong enough to meet leaders' ambitions for all pupils to achieve well. As a result, pupils do not have the skills and knowledge to learn well enough in these subjects. Leaders need to ensure that curriculum planning is consistently strong in all subject areas.
- In a small number of subjects, teachers do not check carefully that pupils have learned and remembered key information. As a result, pupils do not learn sufficient knowledge to understand and apply their learning in new contexts. Leaders need to make sure that teachers have the subject-specific knowledge and skills to ensure that pupils learn well.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use Ofsted Parent View information when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	118882
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10122201
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	741
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	69
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Derek Cuff
Headteacher	Tanya Kelvie
Website	www.aylesford.kent.sch.uk/
Date of previous inspection	14–15 December 2017, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- A very small number of pupils attend lessons at Maidstone and Malling Alternative Provision, a pupil referral unit, and the Kent Health Needs Education Service.
- The school has an above-average number of pupils with SEND.

Information about this inspection

We carried out this inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- We held meetings with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher and other leaders. We also met with a wide range of staff.
- We evaluated the effectiveness of safeguarding. We reviewed the school's single central record and met with the designated safeguarding lead.

- We met with the chair of the governing body and other governors.
- We met with the local authority senior adviser and the school improvement partner.
- An inspector telephoned the alternative providers used by the school.
- We considered the 52 responses to the Ofsted staff questionnaire, 66 responses to Ofsted's Parent View (including 42 free-text comments), and 41 responses to Ofsted's pupil questionnaire.
- We met with groups of pupils to discuss their views on the school and talked to pupils informally about the school.
- We did deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, history and modern foreign languages. For each of these four subjects, we had a meeting with the subject leader to look at their curriculum plans, visited several lessons with leaders, talked to pupils about their work, looked at pupils' books and talked to the teachers whose classes we had visited. We also looked at pupils' books from art, science, geography and religious education.

Inspection team

Christopher Lee, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Ann Fearon	Ofsted Inspector
Scott Norman	Ofsted Inspector
Anne Cullum	Ofsted Inspector

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