

# Inspection of a good school: Amersham School

Stanley Hill, Amersham, Buckinghamshire, HP7 9HH

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Inspection dates:

29–30 June 2021

## **Outcome**

Amersham School continues to be a good school.

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

This happy, inclusive, and ambitious school is described by many as the 'Amersham family'. Older pupils and sixth-form students take pleasure in playing an active role in their community and supporting their younger peers. Parents particularly value how well staff support their child, promoting self-esteem and character as well as academic success.

Pupils respect diversity and know that any rudeness or poor behaviour is not tolerated by anyone. Classrooms are calm and focused throughout the school. Knowing their teachers have high expectations and want the best for them ensures pupils take pride in their work and can confidently ask for help when they need it. Sixth-form students organise their studies well.

Pupils speak very highly of the support they receive from adults and feel safe. Should they have any worries, they know they can talk to staff who will work hard to make things right. Any form of bullying is rare.

Pupils benefit from the amazing array of interesting and exciting experiences offered through extra-curricular clubs and house competitions. These include sports, drama, music, debating clubs and many, many more. Pupils are rightly proud of their various community activities and their achievements through the Duke of Edinburgh's award scheme.

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

Parents responding to Parent View described the headteacher as, 'a dynamic and passionate leader who clearly wants the best for all the children in her care' and 'full of infectious enthusiasm'. We agree. This inspirational leadership has fostered a committed and professional team of senior leaders, subject leaders and staff who share a united vision for the pupils at the school.

Senior leaders are very clear on what they want pupils to know and be able to do by the time they leave school. The school has designed a broad and typically ambitious curriculum, which ensures pupils make good progress in learning English, mathematics, science, humanities, art and languages. The sixth-form curriculum provides progression routes for all students who continue studying at the school. Skilled mentorship and bespoke careers education ensure that they are well informed about different career pathways and future study options. Students achieve well, and they go on to their choice of either apprenticeships, work or study at a range of universities, including those in the Russell group.

Skilled subject leaders have developed well-organised plans for how their subjects are taught in the school. Clear links are made to prior learning, which help pupils to reinforce and develop their knowledge. Teachers use these plans to provide thought-provoking activities and then use questioning and discussion well. This helps pupils grasp more difficult concepts and ideas and appreciate the scope of each subject. Over time, pupils develop a rich knowledge of their subjects as well as a range of essential skills preparing them well for life beyond school.

The school's cycles of teaching and assessment are highly effective. The rich information gathered during these cycles underpins the very effective mentoring that staff offer to pupils and sixth-form students. Oversight of this system equips leaders with an in-depth understanding of academic and pastoral provision across the school. This ensures leaders can respond swiftly to adapt provision when necessary to meet pupils' changing needs. However, many governors have only been recruited recently and, as yet, are not experienced enough to hold leaders to account for the quality of education.

Teachers' consistent approach to behaviour management ensures that pupils' behaviour is consistently impressive across the school. Strong and trusting relationships exist between pupils and staff. Pupils are keen to learn and actively engage with the tasks set by their teachers. Sixth formers play a full role in school life and enjoy significant leadership responsibilities, which they fulfil extremely well. Tutors support them to become confident, aspirational and articulate young adults, who are able to manage their own time and work independently.

The leadership and provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is a strength of the school. Staff work in partnership with staff from Stony Dean School to provide effective support for pupils with autism spectrum disorder. Leaders ensure that staff are well trained and support all pupils with SEND well in lessons across the school. Similarly, staff ensure that disadvantaged pupils are supported well. There is little difference between the achievements of disadvantaged pupils and their peers.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders provide regular high-quality training for all staff and governors. Effective communication and systematic record keeping in school ensures that leaders are well informed about vulnerable pupils. Staff are vigilant and aware of the actions they must

take if they have any concerns about a pupil. They work well with external agencies to secure any additional support needed for pupils.

Pupils and sixth-form students can confidently explain what they need to do to keep themselves safe, including when online. They value the advice they receive from staff and know that they are mindful and supportive of their mental and physical health.

## **What does the school need to do to improve?**

### **(Information for the school and appropriate authority)**

- Key stage 3 has been shortened to be covered in Year 7 and 8. Senior leaders' creative timetabling enables pupils to study all national curriculum subjects and others, such as dance and drama. However, some foundation subjects, such as design technology, have limited teaching time and so not all pupils experience the full key stage 3 national curriculum within the subject before taking their options. Leaders have taken appropriate action to change this from next year. For this reason, the transition arrangements have been applied in this case.
- The governing body does not yet have a sufficiently in-depth understanding of all aspects of the curriculum to be able to challenge leaders in sufficient depth. While they bring a wealth of relevant skills and experience, the majority of governors have been recruited relatively recently, with several being recruited during the pandemic so having little contact with staff on site. Training is underway and needs to continue to support governors in their role to challenge leaders to refine and enhance the curriculum still further.

## **Background**

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good or outstanding school, because it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find some evidence that a good school could now be better than good, or that standards may be declining, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will convert the section 8 inspection to a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be good in March 2016.

## **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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	137343
<b>Local authority</b>	Buckinghamshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	10192842
<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary comprehensive
<b>School category</b>	Academy converter
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11 to 18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	916
<b>Of which, number on roll in the sixth form</b>	152
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair of governing body</b>	Neil Spencer
<b>Headteacher</b>	Sharon Jarrett
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.amershamschool.org.uk">www.amershamschool.org.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	15–16 March 2016

## Information about this school

- The school works in partnership with Stony Dean School to support some of the pupils with SEND, and with 'Aspire' in Aylesbury for the education of a small number of pupils who require alternative provision.

## Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the 2020-2021 COVID-19 pandemic. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school, and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior leaders, staff, pupils and sixth formers and the chair and vice chair of the governing body.
- Deep dives were conducted in English, history, science and design technology. In each of these subjects, inspectors met with subject leaders, visited lessons, talked to pupils

about their work and met with teaching staff to talk about their approach to designing and delivering the curriculum.

- Inspectors considered the views of 58 members of staff who responded to the confidential staff survey and the 147 responses to Ofsted's Parent View survey, which included 122 free text responses.
- Meetings were held with groups of pupils and sixth formers to discuss their views about many different aspects of their school. Inspectors also considered the 201 responses to Ofsted's online pupil survey.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding inspectors viewed the school website and policies. Meetings were held with safeguarding leaders, spoke to pupils and staff, scrutinised school records of the safeguarding checks on adults working in the school and spoke to governors.
- At the time of the inspection Years 11 and 13 had left the school. Leaders ensured that these pupils were well supported with preparation for their next steps beyond school before they left. Channels of communication developed during the period of remote education are being used to maintain contact with them. Some Year 11 pupils were being supported to continue to attend school to help them catch up on any learning they may have missed before they left.

## **Inspection team**

Matthew Newberry, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Chris Ellison

Her Majesty's Inspector

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