

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **AYLESBURY GRAMMAR SCHOOL**

Aylesbury

LEA area: Buckinghamshire

Unique reference number: 110511

Headteacher: Mr Steve Harvey

Reporting inspector: Ms Margaret Julia Goodchild  
15918

Dates of inspection: 18 – 20 September 2000

Inspection number: 223878

Inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Grammar (Selective)

School category: Voluntary controlled

Age range of pupils: 11 - 18

Gender of pupils: Boys

School address: Walton Road  
Aylesbury  
Buckinghamshire

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Appropriate authority: The governing body

Name of chair of governors: Professor W R Mead

Date of previous inspection: May 1995

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## **PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT**

### **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

Aylesbury Grammar School is a selective school for boys. Entrance is at 11 plus, via a national selection test. The top 33 per cent of pupils in Buckinghamshire are transferred to grammar schools, of which Aylesbury Grammar is one. The school's intake is therefore of above average attainment, representing the top third of ability, although the school does not operate any higher level of selection. It is the school's policy to admit students to the sixth form from local upper schools, so that around 30 students have not been educated in a selective school before entry into the sixth form. Pupils come from over 50 primary schools from a wide geographic area. Since the last inspection, the school has become a technology college and, in common with other Buckinghamshire schools, now takes pupils from age 11 to 18 instead of 12 to 18. The first full Year 7 intake entered the school in September 1999, increasing the roll to 1261.

The school is bigger than other secondary schools, and has a very large sixth form (363). The percentage of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is well below the national average. The number of pupils speaking English as an additional language is higher than in most schools, whilst the percentage of pupils identified as having special educational needs or a statement for their needs is well below the national average.

### **HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS**

Aylesbury Grammar School is a very good school: it achieves excellent examination results and is very effective in promoting pupils' personal development. An excellent curriculum and good teaching, with a significant amount of high quality teaching, enable pupils to achieve very well. The school is well led and efficiently managed. It provides very good value for money.

#### **What the school does well**

- The examination results at GCSE and A/AS level place the school in the top five per cent of schools nationally and pupils achieve very well.
- The school provides pupils with excellent curricular and extra-curricular opportunities.
- The quality of teaching and learning contributes strongly to high standards.
- The school is very effective in promoting pupils' personal development and in caring for its pupils.
- Music is a clear strength of the school.
- The school is well led, efficiently managed and provides very good value for money.

#### **What could be improved**

- Further development is needed to improve assessment practices, annual reporting to parents, and the tracking of pupils' progress.
- There is potential for raising standards still further by ensuring that all teaching contains the features already present in the best teaching.
- The requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship is not fully met.

*The areas for improvement will form the basis of the governors' action plan.*

## HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has made good improvement since its last inspection, in 1995. At Key Stage 3, results have improved in line with the national trend but at GCSE the improvement has exceeded it. A/AS level results remain exceptionally high. Whereas the last inspection judged more able pupils to be achieving less well than average or lower attainers, this inspection found that gifted and talented pupils are achieving very well. Since the last inspection, the school has been awarded technology college status, achieved Investors in People, and has grown more successful in sport.

Monitoring the work of departments has improved through increased monitoring by the headteacher and by the governors' curriculum committee, together with detailed analysis of examination results. The school recognises the need to increase monitoring further and the revised senior management team and line management structure, together with implementation of the Performance Management Framework should take care of remaining areas. National Curriculum requirements have been built fully into subject planning, but information technology (IT) is not yet entirely integrated into schemes of work across the curriculum. The recent appointment of an IT co-ordinator and planned training should complete the incorporation of IT and examples of work seen in IT during the inspection were at least in line with national expectations. Some improvement has been made to annual reports to parents but they do not provide clear information on pupils' attainment and progress within given subjects. Attempts have been made to meet the statutory requirement for a daily act of collective worship and all assemblies during the inspection met requirements. However, extended tutor periods do not include an act or worship, so the requirement for a daily act of collective worship is not fully met.

## STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 16 year olds and 18 year olds based on average point scores in GCSE and A/AS level examinations.

Performance in:	compared with				<b>Key</b>
	all schools			similar schools	
	1997	1998	1999	1999	
GCSE examinations	A*	A*	A*	B	well above average A above average B average C below average D well below average E
A / AS level examinations	A*	A*	A*	N/a	

The school's results at GCSE and at A/AS level have been consistently very high over the past three years compared with schools nationally, putting the school in the top five per cent in the country. The school's results in 2000 show a further improvement on previous years, with 100 per cent of pupils at GCSE achieving a minimum of five A\* to C grades. The school's National Curriculum test results at the end of Key Stage 3 have been very high in English, mathematics and science compared with results nationally over the last three years.

In comparison with similar schools, the results are above average in Key Stage 3 tests and at GCSE. Results in mathematics and science at Key Stage 3 are well above those nationally for similar schools; those for English were in line with results for similar schools in 1999. At GCSE, the proportion of pupils gaining five or more A\* to C grades is above that of similar

schools; the proportion gaining five or more grades A\* to G or one or more A\* to G is in line with results in similar schools.

When pupils enter the school, they are attaining in the top 33 per cent in Buckinghamshire as measured by the 11 plus examination but by the time they take their GCSEs, they are performing in the top five percent in the country. This represents very good achievement, and the same high rate of progress is sustained at A/AS level. Standards seen in lessons during the inspection were nearly always above national expectations and frequently well above. Pupils were attaining particularly high standards in chemistry, physics and music, but there were many examples of high quality work in most subjects of the curriculum.

## PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Pupils have very positive attitudes, appreciate the opportunities the school provides and show an obvious enjoyment in learning.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Pupils behave very well in lessons and around the school. Their behaviour supports effective learning, ensuring that time is well used.
Personal development and relationships	Pupils' personal development and relationships are very good. They work very well together and respect the views of others; they readily take responsibility.
Attendance	The attendance rate is very high and supports pupils' progress.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged 11-14 years	Aged 14-16 years	Aged 16-18 years
Lessons seen overall	Good	Very good	Good

*Inspectors make judgements about teaching in the range: excellent; very good; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; poor; very poor. 'Satisfactory' means that the teaching is adequate and strengths outweigh weaknesses.*

Teaching is a clear strength, contributing much to pupils' achievement; there is a significant amount of very good and sometimes excellent teaching. In 98 per cent of lessons, teaching was at least satisfactory; in 79 per cent, it was at least good; in 46 per cent, it was at least very good; in 6 per cent, it was excellent. Teaching was good in English and mathematics, and very good in science. Excellent teaching occurred during the inspection in chemistry, physics and music.

The school provides well for the full range of ability within the school and for the needs of different groups of pupils. It provides very well for those with special educational needs, particularly for pupils with specific learning difficulties. The teaching of literacy is good in English and well supported across the curriculum. The teaching of numeracy is satisfactory, with plans to take full account of the National Numeracy Strategy to develop a programme for numeracy across the curriculum.

Pupils are very effective learners who settle quickly to work, apply themselves well and make the most of any opportunity to extend their knowledge and understanding. They work very well in collaboration with other pupils in groups and when researching independently.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The school provides excellent curricular and extra-curricular opportunities. The quality and range of the curriculum contributes a great deal to pupils' personal and academic achievement, forming a foundation for the excellent examination results.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	The school provides very well for pupils with special educational needs. Support for pupils with specific learning difficulties is especially thoughtful and effective.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	The school's provision for pupils with English as an additional language is effective, enabling these pupils to achieve in line with the rest of the school population.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	The school provides very well for pupils' personal development. Provision for moral, social and cultural development is very good; that for spiritual development is good. The wide range of extra-curricular activities makes an excellent contribution to pupils' overall development.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The school cares very well for its pupils. There is a strong pastoral support structure, teachers are sensitive to individual pupils' needs and systems for child protection are very good.

## HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The school is well led by the headteacher and senior managers. Staff with specific management responsibilities generally fulfil them effectively and often very effectively.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors are very supportive of the school as well as holding it to account. They are concerned with maintaining traditions and upholding excellence but also show a strong commitment to improvement and development.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The school is effective in evaluating its own performance and senior managers are well aware of areas in which further development is possible and desirable.
The strategic use of resources	The school uses its resources very effectively and seeks to achieve best value in its spending. Staff work very hard to overcome some shortcomings in the accommodation.

## PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most parents value the quality of education that the school provides.</li> <li>• They are satisfied with the progress that their children make and the standards that the school achieves.</li> <li>• They believe that the teaching is good.</li> <li>• They consider that the school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some parents feel that there is too little homework, others that there is too much.</li> <li>• Some parents do not feel sufficiently informed about how their children are getting on.</li> <li>• Some parents feel that the school is unapproachable and keeps them at a distance.</li> <li>• Some parents express concern about how the school is led and anxiety about the number of staff who have recently left.</li> </ul>

Inspectors' judgements support parents' positive views. Homework is set regularly in accordance with a timetable, it is generally appropriate and extends learning. A revised homework diary invites parents in the lower school to sign when homework has been completed. The school keeps parents well informed and tries to involve them, except for a lack of specific detail in annual reports. The school is well led and the new headteacher has introduced a number of valuable initiatives. There have been some promising new appointments and internal promotions: inspectors do not share parents' concerns about recent staff changes and lesson observation shows that teaching is of good, and frequently very good, quality.

## **PART B: COMMENTARY**

### **WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL**

#### **The examination results at GCSE and A/AS level place the school in the top five per cent of schools nationally and pupils achieve very well**

- 1 The school's National Curriculum test results at the end of Key Stage 3 have been very high compared with results nationally over the last three years in English, mathematics and science. In English in 1999, all pupils achieved Level 5 or above; 89 per cent of pupils achieved Level 6 or above, and 30 per cent achieved Level 7 or above. In mathematics, 99 per cent of pupils gained Level 5 or above; 98 per cent achieved Level 6 or above, and 82 per cent achieved Level 7 or above. In science, 100 per cent of pupils achieved Level 5 or above; 92 per cent achieved Level 6 or above, and 47 per cent achieved Level 7 or above. These results are all very high compared with results nationally, with outstanding achievement at the higher levels in mathematics. Results over the last three years consistently place the school in the top 5 per cent nationally. In comparison with similar schools, the school's results are above average. Results in mathematics and science at Key Stage 3 are well above those for similar schools; those for English in 1999 were close to the average for similar schools.
- 2 The school's results at GCSE have been consistently very high over the past three years compared with schools nationally, putting the school in the top 5 per cent in the country. In 1999, 98.8 per cent of pupils gained five or more A\* to C grades at GCSE; 99.4 per cent achieved five or more A\* to G grades. In comparison with similar schools, the school's results in 1999 were above average at GCSE. The proportion of pupils gaining five or more A\* to C grades was above that of similar schools; the proportion gaining five or more grades A\* to G or one or A\* to G was in line with results in similar schools. Comparing pupils' GCSE results with their prior attainment, as measured by end of Key Stage 3 tests, shows that pupils at Aylesbury Grammar School make better progress during Key Stage 4 than the progress made by pupils in similar schools nationally.
- 3 The school's results at GCE A/AS level have been consistently very high over the past three years compared with schools nationally. This is the case both for the small minority of candidates entered for less than two A/AS levels and for the vast majority who were entered for two or more A/AS levels. Students' achievements are particularly high in chemistry, physics, business studies, classics, computer science, history, and politics.
- 4 The trend in the school's results in end of Key Stage 3 tests for all core subjects has been broadly in line with the national trend over the last few years. The rising trend at GCSE has been above the upward trend nationally. The school's GCSE results showed a further upward trend in 2000, with 100 per cent of pupils gaining five or more A\* to C grades.
- 5 When pupils enter the school in Year 7, their attainment is in the top 33 per cent in Buckinghamshire - as measured by the 11 plus examination - and the school undertakes no further selection process. By the end of Key Stage 4 when pupils take their GCSEs, their attainment has risen to the top five percent nationally. GCSE and A/AS level results represent a significant gain in pupils' attainment and show that the school is enabling pupils to achieve very well.
- 6 Very good achievement was evident in many lessons during the inspection. Pupils' attainment was almost invariably above national expectations, with high standards evident in many lessons and in much of the work scrutinised. Whereas the last inspection

judged more able pupils to be achieving less well than average or lower attainers, the findings of this inspection indicate that pupils of all abilities are achieving at least well and that gifted and talented pupils are achieving very well. No group or groups of pupils were found to be achieving less well, including pupils of minority ethnic heritage. Pupils with special educational needs, including those with specific learning difficulties, make very good progress as a result of high quality support.

- 7 In lessons observed, pupils' attainment was particularly high in chemistry, physics and music, but across the curriculum there were many examples of work that was well above national expectations. In a Year 9 chemistry lesson, pupils knew that salol is phenyl salicylate, that igneous rocks contain crystals and that slow cooling rocks contain large crystals, and they performed practical experiments with skill and confidence. In a Year 11 chemistry lesson, most pupils were working towards A or A\* grades at GCSE and, in their investigation of the products of distillation, they understood that complete combustion of hydrocarbons produces carbon dioxide and water, and that incomplete combustion produces a sooty flame. They understood that hydrocarbons burning with a sooty flame are high boiling point fractions, and knew that anhydrous copper sulphate is used to test for the presence of water. In a Year 13 physics lesson where students were working towards potential A grades at A level, they consolidated their knowledge of how to calculate electric fields between parallel plates. They knew how to calculate the ratio of capacitances of two capacitors and could justify their answers by describing qualitatively how the voltage between the plates would be affected if the upper plate were moved horizontally in relation to the lower plate. In music, Year 9 pupils learned the difference between the sounds of major and minor chords, so that in a short space of time they could play both major and minor chords effectively in simple musical pieces on their keyboards. In Year 10, pupils successfully wrote a descant for a film soundtrack by selecting appropriate notes from the chords of a given piece and adding the descant to the melody to create interesting and contrasting textures.
- 8 Pupils' literacy skills do much to support the progress that they make in all subjects. Their ideas flow easily and are quickly recorded in well-organised written notes. They are confident and articulate speakers, whether answering questions, taking part in discussions or giving presentations in front of the class. They read with expression and by the end of Key Stage 4, the best reading is authoritative and dramatic. Pupils show a good understanding of what they read and apply a range of reading skills very effectively to support their work across the curriculum.

### **The school provides pupils with excellent curricular and extra-curricular opportunities**

- 9 Excellent curricular and extra-curricular opportunities underpin the high standards that the school achieves, providing pupils with a very wide range of opportunities as well as giving them the chance to excel in areas where they are especially talented. This is achieved through a combination of an outstanding number of accredited courses, along with extensive extra-curricular opportunities. Pupils are able to study for a large number of GCSEs and the school has one of the largest sixth forms in the country, which offers a wide range of A/AS level courses. By doing extra subjects outside normal lesson time, pupils are able to take 13 or more GCSEs. Gifted and talented pupils are extended via special projects, early GCSE entry in some subjects and tuition in the sixth form to support Oxbridge entrance. The school chooses examination boards and courses which best suit the aptitudes of the pupils, and there is constant review and evaluation of practice to improve outcomes for pupils. At A level, a small minority of students take only two A levels together with general studies A level. More able pupils take up to five A levels,

and obtain grade As in all of them. Others take A level early and one recently went on to university at the end of Year 12. In the sixth form, gifted and talented students are encouraged to take S levels and STEP, and the school has been involved in the trials for the new Advanced Extension papers in summer 2000. The destinations of students leaving Aylesbury Grammar at the end of Year 13 show that they are able to choose exciting and often highly specialised degree courses as a result of the thorough foundation provided for them at GCSE and A/AS level. It is clear that the curriculum opens many higher education and career opportunities for its pupils.

- 10 The school offers an excellent range of extra-curricular clubs and societies in which a large number of pupils take part, inter-house competitions, field trips and entry into competitions where pupils have been successful in winning national awards. Opportunities for sporting activities are outstanding. The school has held the Sportsmark Award since its inception, and has considerable success locally, regionally and nationally in a wide range of sports. It was one of the first schools in the country to gain the Gold Award. The main sports are: rugby, hockey (a virtually unbeaten first XI this year), football (County Under 19 winners twice in the last four years), squash (the school has two nationally ranked players and seven times national champions), karate (many medal winners), basketball (in the top eight in this year's national competition), and cross-country. Swimming is popular and pupils have additional opportunities to go on skiing trips and to learn fencing and rifle-shooting, to play tennis and to take part in athletics. A number of competitive sporting and other events take place between the six houses, extending opportunities for pupils to compete in an activity that appeals to them.
- 11 A wealth of other extra-curricular opportunities contribute a great deal to pupils' personal development as well as to their academic achievement, ranging from Japanese conversation to rifle shooting. Many pupils take part in the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme and several are working for Gold. Plans are under way for a visit to Nepal – the third such venture in three years – and the list of educational visits is long and diverse. The Year 8 Pupil Research Team won the Top Young Scientist Award, and has been invited to lecture at the Royal Institution; the school hosted the Pupil Research Community National Conference this year. The chess team has won many national competitions and the senior public speaking team narrowly missed taking the national 'Youth Speaks' title this year.
- 12 As well as its provision for gifted and talented pupils, the school makes very good provision for pupils with special educational needs, especially those with specific learning difficulties. In addition to the special educational needs co-ordinator, the school employs a qualified counsellor and a specialist teacher to support pupils with specific learning difficulties (dyslexia), usually on a one-to-one support basis. As a result of the support provided, pupils with special educational needs make very good progress alongside other pupils.
- 13 The school has very effective community and business links. Its strong community links have been forged especially through its role as a technology college. It has established a thriving outreach programme with local primary schools, for example providing master classes in mathematics and science for Year 6 pupils, and the school has been awarded technology college status for a further three years, from September 2000, partly based on its successful community outreach work. The school is closely linked with its major sponsor for technology college status, British Aerospace, and is one of its sponsor's five International Network Schools in Britain. Sixth formers are able to shadow managers of local companies and key professionals in their daily work. Additionally, there are close links with the universities of York and Loughborough, links with the nearby high school for

girls and strong and developing links with schools abroad, for example, through video-conferencing.

### **The quality of teaching and learning contributes strongly to high standards**

- 14 Teaching and learning are clear strengths that contribute much to pupils' achievement. There is a significant amount of very good and occasionally excellent teaching. During the inspection, teaching was at least satisfactory in 98 per cent of lessons; it was at least good in 79 per cent; at least very good in 46 percent; it was excellent in 6 per cent. Teaching is good in English and mathematics, and very good in science. Excellent teaching occurred during the inspection in chemistry, physics and music.
- 15 The best teaching is dynamic and charismatic. Inspirational teaching is found most typically in science, design and technology, German, geography, history, Latin, music and Spanish. In the vast majority of lessons, teachers have very secure subject knowledge. They display a very good appreciation of what is needed in order to achieve excellent examination results. Their enthusiasm and knowledge about the subjects they teach inspire pupils to provide high quality work. Teachers communicate high expectations to pupils about the amount and standard of work that is required and about the level of application expected. Pupils are given definite direction and challenge through clear explanations and some very probing questioning that extends their thinking. Excellent questioning is especially evident in history and geography in the sixth form and in science and music across the school.
- 16 Planning is usually detailed and it is excellent where teaching is at its best. Objectives are usually clear. Where they are shared with pupils, they are clear about how each part of the lesson contributes to the overall intention, and they are able to evaluate their achievement against what they are meant to have learned. The sharing of objectives with pupils contributes to their high level of motivation in many lessons, ensuring that they co-operate with the teacher in the very effective use of all available time.
- 17 Where teaching is very good or excellent, activities are varied so that pupils approach a given topic from a number of different angles and remain stimulated throughout the lesson. In a very good Year 9 lesson in English, pupils discussed the class reading book, *To Kill a Mocking Bird*, analysed one of the main characters, produced a written description and took part in a short role play. Each activity was carefully timed and a great deal of learning was covered in the course of the lesson, leading to a deeper understanding by the pupils who remained absolutely focused throughout.
- 18 Most teachers manage pupils' behaviour very effectively. Teaching and learning are focused and a strong sense of shared purpose between teachers and pupils is evident in many lessons. There is a good balance between praise and challenge. Timely intervention moves pupils on and keeps the focus on learning clear. Where the teaching is very good, teachers take opportunities to encourage independence and give pupils responsibility for their own learning. In a Year 8 mathematics lesson, for example, a boy arrived at an interesting discovery when looking for patterns in algebraic rules. The teacher gave him the opportunity to demonstrate his findings formally to the class, which he did very successfully, supporting the learning of the rest of the class, gaining the attention of other pupils and highlighting the importance of individual exploration.
- 19 Teachers pay careful attention to the development of basic skills. Pupils are frequently given opportunities to develop individual research skills and to take part in groupwork. The teaching of note-taking skills in history and geography encourages pupils to organise their notes clearly. The teaching of literacy is good in English, with useful contributions

from history, geography and IT. The teaching of numeracy is satisfactory, with plans to take full account of the National Numeracy Strategy to develop a programme for numeracy across the curriculum; very good attention is given to numeracy in science and music.

- 20 Teachers provide well for pupils' different needs and the school provides very well for those with special educational needs, particularly for pupils with specific learning difficulties. In a one-to-one support session for a pupil with specific learning difficulties, the teacher showed very secure knowledge of dyslexia. A focus on study skills included very instructive and constructive advice and feedback on what the pupil had achieved, enabling the pupil to take part freely in a dialogue about his progress. In the majority of lessons, pupils with special educational needs are integrated very effectively with other pupils, sometimes using learning aids to support their achievement.
- 21 Teachers make very good use of time and lessons proceed at a good pace. In science and geography lessons, for example, a great deal of learning was covered in the time available in lessons. Where teaching is excellent and sometimes where it is very good, teachers make excellent use of well-chosen resources giving rise to interesting lessons where pupils have every opportunity to make progress. Resources were very effectively linked to the curriculum content in lessons in music, science, modern languages and communication studies. Across a number of lessons in science, excellent use was made of IT, the Internet, CD-ROMs, sensors, videos, electronic instruments and practical science apparatus to support well-chosen investigations. In design and technology and IT, pupils achieve well partly as a result of the very good facilities and the way they are used.
- 22 Excellent marking and feedback to individuals on how to improve is evident in German at A level, in the practice of many teachers in science and often in design and technology and mathematics. In a Year 11 design and technology lesson on electronics, the teacher monitored pupils' progress very carefully. The task was split into six objectives with individual deadlines. Within these, each pupil was given a specific target and a weekly interview with the teacher. As a result, pupils were very aware of the criteria for assessment and how to achieve particular grades. The teacher used knowledge of the progress of individuals to brief groups and to communicate with the whole class in a way that led to strong motivation and high standards. Excellent use of prior learning was also evident in a Year 9 chemistry lesson where detailed evaluative comments by the teacher led into whole class discussion, with pupils testing out their hypotheses following a practical experiment.
- 23 Homework is consistently set in a range of subjects. The quality of homework tasks is usually good and there were examples during the inspection of very good homework tasks. Students in physics in Year 13 were set homework that provided very good research opportunities and contributed significantly to their work towards a number of potential A grades.
- 24 Pupils' positive attitude to learning is a major strength and they respond very well to what is expected of them. They really want to learn and so apply themselves well, maintaining their concentration and remaining focused generally for the duration of the lesson. They are very good listeners, whether to one another or to the teacher, and confident and articulate speakers who readily discuss their work and can explain clearly the process of their learning. They work well collaboratively and readily wait their turn or take responsibilities within a group situation. Their self-awareness as learners enables them to evaluate their progress and understand how a portion of learning fits into a greater whole. They settle quickly and studiously to written work and are diligent in setting out

their notes. Written work across the curriculum shows that they have learned how to arrange information coherently and in a way that supports future revision. Their self-motivation means that they are keen to engage in extra work after school or to take part in extra-curricular activities. They exercise intellectual, creative and physical effort, throwing themselves into a wide range of activities. They readily engage in individual and independent research, taking the initiative whenever they are given the opportunity to do so and willingly contributing their personal interpretations. They make the most of the time available in lessons and extract the maximum from every learning opportunity: even if teaching is on occasion a little dull, they glean whatever they can from it. A sense of purpose and direction is evident in pupils' learning and, indeed, in their overall response to what the school has to offer from Year 7 onwards.

### **The school is very effective in promoting pupils' personal development and in caring for its pupils**

- 25 Provision for personal development and the care that the school provides for pupils are important factors not only in the academic success that pupils achieve but also in the very positive way that they respond to what the school has to offer. The school is especially successful in promoting pupils' self-confidence and in conveying to them a belief in their capacity to achieve. It does this not only by offering them a rich variety of opportunities but also by encouraging them at every opportunity to believe in their own potential. This is evident when individual teachers address a class, in assemblies and in the interactions between teachers and pupils during extra-curricular activities. Pupils are encouraged but also challenged to make the most of what they bring to the school and of what the school has to offer. Just as boys are aware that they are valued, they are taught to value others and their response to one another's contributions in class and during lunchtime clubs suggests that they do so. A strong personal, social and health education programme covers important areas (sex and drugs education, study skills, self assessment), supports pupils' moral and social development and is appreciated by pupils of all ages. Extra-curricular activities contribute much to personal development and there is a vast range of different opportunities for pupils to extend their inner and outer experience.
- 26 Provision for spiritual development is good. A prayer and opportunity for reflection were included at the end of all the assemblies during the inspection and pupils responded thoughtfully, silently bowing their heads. Religious education lessons make a particularly good contribution to pupils' spiritual development and a very effective period of reflection is included at the end of religious education lessons. Opportunities for spiritual development are also provided in other subjects and through some extra-curricular activities. In science, pupils are inspired to pursue excellence and show maturity in their exploration of the world around them, and in rifle shooting in the sixth form, there is much emphasis on inner stillness. In response to the school's provision, pupils show a well-developed understanding of personal and religious values. They show self-awareness and respect the opinions of others, frequently revealing sensitivity to the feelings of people in situations that are beyond their own direct experience.
- 27 Provision for pupils' social development is very good. Social skills are developed early with Year 7 residential visits, in which each tutor group spends time away from home with its tutor and is involved in various challenging events. The house system provides opportunities for pupils to take responsibility and develop skills of leadership as well as co-operation. Senior boys have a considerable responsibility within their houses and as prefects. In this role, they make a significant contribution to the support and guidance of younger pupils, being immediately accessible as they move around the school. They show that they are willing to help others and readily take responsibility, whether

contributing to special events, induction, or in the day-to-day duties they undertake. Pupils lower down the school are also quick to take initiative and do not have to wait to be told to put chairs away after assembly or to pick up any litter that they happen to see. The student council meets regularly to discuss issues raised by pupils. Teamwork in sport, and group and paired work in many lessons contribute to social development. Pupils work well together and enjoy very good relationships with one another. There are also many examples of good relationships between pupils and members of staff.

- 28 The school makes very good provision for pupils' moral development. Most assemblies contribute to moral development and it was apparent that teachers are good role models for pupils. Teachers have high expectations for pupils but also show them respect, frequently referring to them as 'gentlemen'. Furthermore, the reputation that the school has predisposes pupils to adopt a studious, civilised attitude. Even within a few weeks of arriving in the school, it is evident that the school's traditions and expectations are having a distinct impact on the way pupils conduct themselves and on the way that they feel about themselves. Behaviour is very good around the school and in lessons, and positive behaviour makes a very good contribution to the progress that pupils make. As well as contributing to school life, pupils are involved in work within the community and in fundraising and charitable work. The school regularly collects to buy medical supplies for Malawi and pupils are encouraged to give a small sum regularly.
- 29 The school makes very good provision for pupils' cultural development. Pupils study the work of other artists within art lessons and visit galleries. In music, they experience a great deal that is culturally rich through involvement in concerts and musical events as well as through their lessons. In religious education, they study world religions and gain a good understanding of beliefs and values in different cultures. In English, pupils study the writings of authors from their own and other cultures, and have opportunities to take part in drama and to watch plays. There are extensive opportunities to visit other countries and experience very different cultures, together with regular links with educational institutions in other countries. Pupils experience a range of cultures through trips and visits, as well as through the curricular and extra-curricular opportunities that the school provides.
- 30 The school cares very well for its pupils and has a coherent system for supporting pupils and for dealing with problems that they may experience. The system for child protection is very good: all staff receive annual training in identifying and dealing with suspected cases of child abuse. There is an obvious sensitivity towards individual pupils' needs with on-going informal discussion about individuals, as well as regular meetings where the progress and development of groups of pupils are considered.
- 31 In response to the school's provision for personal development and the level of care it provides, pupils are polite, respectful and well mannered. They value high achievement and the school's traditions: they are most supportive of the school and express gratitude at the education it provides for them.

### **Music is a clear strength of the school**

- 32 The school provides excellent curricular and extra-curricular opportunities for pupils to develop musically. There is a very wide range of carefully chosen extra-curricular activities, appealing to different musical tastes and thus involving a significant number of pupils, with musical events held throughout the year. There is, for example, a swing band, a junior jazz band, a Dixieland band, a choral society, a treble choir, a string orchestra, a brass group and a guitar group. The school puts on its own concerts and musicals, as well as contributing widely to music making in Buckinghamshire and

beyond, including performing in the Royal Albert Hall and the Millennium Dome. Two years ago, the Jazz Band won a national competition, and this year the school mounted a production of 'Guys and Dolls' in conjunction with the girls' high school. A large number of musical groups, choirs and societies are on offer at lunchtimes and after school.

- 33 Much of the teaching in music is excellent. It is lively and charismatic, challenging pupils to maximise their achievement. Lessons proceed at a rapid pace fired by enthusiastic, often passionate, teaching. Pupils are really motivated to try their best to succeed. Excellent subject knowledge results in very well conceived lessons, high quality guidance and feedback, excellent learning opportunities and high standards. The school is very well resourced for music and makes excellent use of its accommodation and facilities. Having an electronic keyboard for each pupil does much to support high achievement, enabling pupils to progress as rapidly as possible at their own pace, so that pupils who have limited experience of music when they start at Aylesbury Grammar quickly develop above average skills, knowledge and understanding in the subject.
- 34 Music makes a profound contribution to the spiritual and personal development of those pupils who play regularly at lunchtimes and in performances but also contributes a great deal to the life of the school. Playing, for example in the lunchtime rehearsal of the Dixieland Band, was joyful and exhilarating. The *joie de vivre* evident in pupils' playing and in their readiness to improvise, taking the music often to a level of transcendence rarely found in a school setting, contributes much to spiritual development at an individual and collective level. Frequently, beautiful playing can be heard around the corridors as a pupil practises the piano in the hall and, at lunchtimes, a number of different musical groups can be heard singing and playing together.

#### **The school is well led, efficiently managed and provides very good value for money**

- 35 The headteacher was appointed a year ago and, in a school with a tradition of long-serving headteachers, he is necessarily at quite an early stage in making a visible impression on the school. A minority of parents expressed concern about his leadership but inspection findings do not support their views.
- 36 The headteacher is providing good leadership and is perceptive in his analysis of the school's strengths and of those areas where further development is possible. He has already tackled some challenging issues, undertaken a significant amount of direct monitoring and provided support to individual teachers. Moreover, his restructuring of the senior management team has strengthened the management of the school, providing a clear system of line management capable of supporting performance management. The school has a performance management policy in place, it recognises the need to develop monitoring further at departmental level but, at whole school level, it is ahead of many schools in its preparations for the introduction of performance management.
- 37 In their commitment to maintaining excellence whilst also seeking to develop the school, the headteacher, senior managers and governors are united. Senior managers are effective in evaluating the school's performance and are aware of most areas in which further development is possible and desirable, for example, an area where further development could better inform evaluation is that of pupil tracking, and the school has identified this as a priority for development. Other priorities for development are closely linked to raising achievement and improving further the quality of education provided.
- 38 The governing body provides strong support and governors are actively involved, many giving significant amounts of time to the school. The establishment of governors'

committees and working groups informs their involvement in strategic planning. The curriculum committee is especially influential in this process. Governors are very effective in holding the school to account through monitoring examination results and setting action plans for any departments whose results show signs of decline. Additionally, long-serving governors have an accurate knowledge of the school's workings and of those features that give it its distinctive character. They are concerned with upholding tradition but also with improving provision wherever possible: the school's excellent examination results do not give rise to any hint of complacency.

- 39 Many departments are very well led and the school has achieved Investors in People status since the last inspection. The school is very efficiently administered from day to day, and the commitment to academic excellence and to the all-round development of pupils is effectively translated into practice.
- 40 The school's resources are used efficiently to support pupils' achievement. A minority of parents expressed concern at the relatively high staff turnover: a number of staff have left in the last two years but inspection findings show that there have been some promising new appointments and some excellent internal promotions. The school is generally well resourced and resources are used very well; the school works very hard to overcome some shortcomings in its accommodation. Financial planning is good and every attempt is made to achieve best value in spending. The expenditure per pupil is about average for a school with a very large sixth form but the results are excellent, placing the school in the top five per cent in the country. Pupils achieve very well when their attainment on entry is taken into account and the school provides very good value for money.

## **WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED**

### **Further development is needed to improve assessment practices, annual reporting to parents, and the tracking of pupils' progress**

- 41 The school has a good assessment policy and there is some good practice in assessing pupils' work and recording the assessment information. At Key Stage 4, pupils feel well supported by marking linked to GCSE grades, merit cards and termly progress reports. Regular feedback on coursework at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form makes pupils feel that they are operating within a structure that supports and guides them. In some subjects, for instance in music, and in the practice of individual teachers, pupils are encouraged to reflect upon what they have achieved and to work towards targets agreed with the teacher or even to set their own targets for improvement. Some departments build assessment into curriculum planning, but others leave each teacher to determine the way work is to be assessed. As a result, there is much variation in assessment practices within departments as well as from subject to subject. There is room for improvement both in the assessment practices, and in the way that assessment is managed and the resulting data used in the school as a whole.
- 42 Responsibility for assessment rests with subject departments and monitoring up to now has been informed by examination results rather than by tracking the progress of individual pupils. Overall examination results are considered and action is taken where the results of any department slip below what is anticipated, leading to clear improvements in one or two subjects which had a weaker year in their results but then picked up again. The school makes use of a national package that predicts A-level results on the basis of success at GCSE but the resulting predictions are not used widely to set on-going targets or to monitor the progress of individual students. Furthermore, there is no overall system for tracking the progress of individual pupils during their time at the school, from key stage to key stage, year to year or within any given year either across or within subjects. The school is right to recognise the need to introduce a system for tracking the progress of individual pupils and to concern itself with collecting data more systematically in order to measure performance. At present, the school is at an early stage in the introduction of such a system and there is scope, for example, for using the tracking of individual progress to explore some apparent variations in the value added by different subjects at GCSE and A level. Aylesbury Grammar School is part of a local consortium, with a small grant from the Department for Education and Employment, which has as its focus the intention to measure performance statistically and raise achievement.
- 43 Parents receive regular reports on their children's attainment and progress but annual reports lack specific detail in relation to each subject. They are too general, focusing rather more on effort and overall performance within subjects than on a pupil's strengths and weaknesses relative to the particular requirements of the subject. The annual report therefore leaves some parents feeling unclear about their child's attainment or about what needs to be done to reach a higher standard.

### **There is potential for raising standards still further by ensuring that all teaching contains the features present in the best teaching**

- 44 Most of the teaching is at least good and much is very good. There is potential, however, for raising standards still further by ensuring that all teaching contains more of the features found within the best teaching in the school. Within teaching that is satisfactory or even in many respects good, as well as in the rare lessons where teaching is unsatisfactory, there is scope for some teachers to improve their practice by paying

attention to those areas where shortcomings currently occur and, thus, increase the progress that pupils make and the enjoyment they derive from their learning.

- 45 Where teaching is satisfactory rather than good, there is often little variation in activities and lessons are dull. Pupils are not always given opportunities to exercise independence in their learning, and there is limited use of visual and other references to enliven the teaching and to stimulate pupils' interest. At times, teachers' appropriate focus on examination success tips into an over-emphasis on narrow examination requirements at the expense of the development of problem-solving skills and a deeper understanding that would ultimately support the highest of results. Whereas the best lessons proceed at a lively and energetic pace, where teaching is just satisfactory the pace is often slow. In a Year 9 Spanish lesson, there was a lot of copying from the overhead projector and overall slowness of pace led to the lesson finishing well after the bell, with yet more time then taken up in setting homework. In a Year 7 English lesson, time was wasted when a number of pupils were told to sit and wait while others completed their corrections, and too much time was spent on recall of the plot thus far in the class reading book. Although the pupils behaved very well, it was obvious that some were becoming bored, losing interest and enthusiasm for the subject. There was little in the lesson to deepen pupils' understanding, to increase their skills or to motivate them.
- 46 Whilst thorough planning is generally a strength, insufficient focus in planning leads to some shortcomings when teachers begin to teach to their plans. There is at times insufficient planning or forethought when introducing a new topic, for example in a Year 7 mathematics lesson where visual display and work on the board were hurried and unprepared and, as a result, progress and depth of learning suffered. In a Year 8 mathematics lesson where planning was weak, explanations were taken straight from the textbook without checking pupils' understanding or probing their grasp of the topic. As a result, pupils were left with unclear instructions about how to set out their work or how to interpret the questions.
- 47 Teachers do not always make enough use of assessment information to match work to different abilities in the class or to set learning targets appropriate to individual needs or capability. This is occasionally coupled with uncertain subject knowledge on the teacher's part, leading to explanations that are unclear to at least some of the pupils. In an unsatisfactory sixth form lesson in mathematics, explanations contained factual errors and left the students dismayed, attempting to correct the misinformation from the teacher. In a Year 9 mathematics lesson, the steps required to complete a mathematical operation were not communicated clearly enough and pupils were unsure of how to proceed. In an English lesson in Year 9, the setting of homework was muddled and the lesson ended leaving pupils unclear of how much of the set book they were meant to read for homework.
- 48 Almost invariably, teachers manage pupils' behaviour well and have very good control of their classes. Pupils, in turn, behave exceptionally well in the vast majority of lessons and any inappropriate behaviour is rare. However, in an unsatisfactory Year 9 lesson in biology, uncharacteristically poor behaviour was managed ineffectively. Failure to manage background noise gave rise to increasingly bad behaviour that the teacher made no attempt to control. The same class of pupils was seen on another occasion behaving very well with a teacher who conveyed high expectations for behaviour and who quickly stemmed any suggestion of non-compliance. In the biology lesson, the teacher did not make use of the school's very good system of sanctions to support in-class discipline and pupils therefore made unsatisfactory progress.

**The requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship is not fully met**

49 The school has worked hard in its attempt to fulfil the statutory requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship. All assemblies end with a prayer in which pupils are invited to bow their heads and pray or reflect silently. They respond very well to the invitation and on the four days each week when any given pupil attends an assembly, statutory requirements are met. The school has difficulty finding enough large spaces to provide assembly venues to accommodate all of its pupils for five days a week and on the fifth day, an extended tutor period is supposed to include an act of collective worship. None of the extended tutor periods visited during the inspection included an act of worship, nor did they contribute to the spiritual development of pupils. The requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship for all pupils is therefore still not fully met.

### **WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?**

50 In order to raise standards still further, the headteacher, senior managers and governors should:

- (1) **Improve the system of assessment\* by:**
  - establishing consistency in assessment practices across departments and monitoring assessment records;
  - stating clearly the strengths and weaknesses in pupils' achievement, through more specific reference to National Curriculum or syllabus requirements as appropriate, when reporting annually to parents;
  - introducing systems for tracking the progress of individual pupils in order to measure the school's overall effectiveness more precisely and support or challenge individual pupils where necessary. (paragraphs 41 – 43)
  
- (2) **Disseminate the characteristics found in the best teaching in order to raise standards still further, so that:**
  - all marking clearly identifies strengths and weaknesses and informs pupils of what to do to improve;
  - work is consistently matched to the full range of abilities in the class;
  - behaviour in class is effectively managed and sanctions are used on the rare occasions when pupils do not behave acceptably;
  - lessons contain variety, including opportunities for pupils to exercise independence in their learning;
  - resources, including visual references, are used to enliven learning and stimulate pupils' interest. (paragraphs 44 – 48)
  
- (3) **Ensure that extended tutor periods include an act of collective worship, thereby addressing the one weakness that currently prevents the school from fulfilling the statutory requirement of providing a daily act of collective worship for all pupils.**  
(paragraph 49)

*\* In its planning, the school has identified this area for development*

## PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

### Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed

86

Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils

26

### Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
5	40	33	19	2	0	0

The table gives the percentage of teaching observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons.

### Information about the school's pupils

#### Pupils on the school's roll

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	898	363
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	9	-

#### Special educational needs

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	-	-
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	34	14

#### English as an additional language

	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	39

#### Pupil mobility in the last school year

	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	4
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	0

### Attendance

#### Authorised absence

	%
School data	3.4
National comparative data	7.9

#### Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.0
National comparative data	1.1

Both tables give the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.

### Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	1999	182	N/A	182

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	182	178	182
	Girls	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Total	182	178	182
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	100	99	100
	National	63 (65)	62 (60)	55 (56)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	89	98	92
	National	28 (35)	38 (36)	23 (27)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	181	182	181
	Girls	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Total	181	182	181
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	99	100	100
	National	64	64	60
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	90	99	95
	National	31 (30)	37 (37)	28 (30)

Percentages in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

### Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	169	N/A	169

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	167	168	168
	Girls	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Total	167	168	168
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	99	99	99
	National	46.6 (44.6)	90.9 (89.8)	95.8 (93.4)

Percentages in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	64
	National	38.0 (36.8)

Figures in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

### Attainment at the end of the sixth form

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	205	0	205

Average A/AS points score per candidate	For candidates entered for 2 or more A-levels or equivalent			For candidates entered for fewer than 2 A-levels or equivalent		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	26.6	N/A	26.6 (27.5)	8.5	N/A	8.5 (3.5)
National	17.7	18.1	17.9 (17.6)	2.7	2.8	2.8 (2.8)

Figures in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

### ***Ethnic background of pupils***

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	0.3
Black – African heritage	0.7
Black – other	0.7
Indian	2.1
Pakistani	1.0
Bangladeshi	0.2
Chinese	1.3
White	85.2
Any other minority ethnic group	5.6

### ***Exclusions in the last school year***

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	8	0
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

*This table gives the number of exclusions, which may be different from the number of pupils excluded.*

### ***Teachers and classes***

#### **Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y11**

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	73.7
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	17.1

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

#### **Education support staff: Y7 – Y11**

Total number of education support staff	16.0
Total aggregate hours worked per week	383

#### **Deployment of teachers: Y7– Y11**

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	75.5
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#### **Average teaching group size: Y7– Y11**

Key Stage 3	28.8
Key Stage 4	23.4

### ***Financial information***

Financial year	1999/2000
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	£
Total income	3022204
Total expenditure	3063147
Expenditure per pupil	2420
Balance brought forward from previous year	42213
Balance carried forward to next year	1270

## Results of the survey of parents and carers

### Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1261
Number of questionnaires returned	383

### Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	46	47	5	1	1
My child is making good progress in school.	53	43	2	1	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	33	59	3	1	4
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	28	56	12	2	2
The teaching is good.	41	54	3	0	2
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	43	44	10	2	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	50	40	8	0	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	73	26	1	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	29	50	16	1	4
The school is well led and managed.	34	43	8	4	11
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	45	46	7	0	2
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	54	38	4	1	3