



Aylesbury Grammar School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 110511
LEA Buckinghamshire LEA
Inspection number 278448
Inspection dates 26 April 2006 to 27 April 2006
Reporting inspector Cathie Munt

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

Type of school	Grammar (selective)	School address	Walton Road
School category	Voluntary controlled		Aylesbury
Age range of pupils	11 to 18		HP21 7RP
Gender of pupils	Boys	Telephone number	01296 484545
Number on roll	1264	Fax number	01296 426502
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr Kevin Hardern
Date of previous inspection	18 September 2000	Headteacher	Mr Steve Harvey

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11 to 18	26 April 2006 - 27 April 2006	278448

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors.

Description of the school

The pupils' attainment on entry is well above average. The proportion entering the school with learning difficulties or disabilities is lower than in schools nationally and the proportion of students eligible for free school meals is very small. Almost all students transfer into the sixth form. The school was granted specialist status in technology in 1997 and in languages in 2006. It has been granted a range of accreditations and awards including the Investor in People Award.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Aylesbury Grammar is a good school with outstanding features. It offers pupils a good education with an appropriate emphasis on developing well rounded individuals. The school rightly has plans which will increase security arrangements. Aylesbury Grammar provides very good value for money.

Examination and test results are extremely high and academic standards are consistently high. In the majority of the lessons observed, pupils of all abilities made very good progress in their learning.

Students are well cared for, and feel safe and happy. Teaching is of a very high calibre and reflects the school's commitment to the pupils' academic development. Although many teachers keep good records, data is not used as effectively as it could be to track the progress of individual pupils.

The school is well led and leadership and management are at least good at every level and are outstanding in the sixth form. Inspectors agree with the school's judgement that its effectiveness is good. Managers know the areas that require further development in the school, for example communication with parents. The capacity to improve further is good, as evidenced by the improvements made since the last inspection. The governing body provides a high level of support and challenge.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The school judges the sixth form to be outstanding; inspection evidence fully supports this view. Teaching is excellent. Teachers have exemplary subject knowledge and plan lessons that challenge and inspire. Consequently, students have impressive attitudes to learning. They are self-critical and are always keen to do better and to benefit from the quality of the advice and support they receive when considering moving on to higher education. Students play a very active part in school life by, for example, leading their houses and teams and assisting younger pupils in their tutor groups. Most take part in the very wide range of sports, music and drama and charity activities outside lessons. They provide excellent role models for the younger boys. A substantial number are active in the local community, undertaking work in hospitals and schools. Students feel valued and know that their opinions are taken seriously. Leadership and management are excellent, ensuring resources, some of which are only adequate, are used very well to meet learners' needs. The sixth form provides excellent value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

Focus on:

- Developing the use of assessment data to provide the senior managers and department heads with timely information about individuals' and groups' progress.
- Implementing the range of planned measures to increase security.

- Improving the partnership between parents, carers and the school and ensuring that the range of information and guidance provided for them is clear and accessible.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

The pupils' attainment on entry to the school is considerably above average. They make good academic progress in key stages 3 and 4 and outstanding progress in the sixth form. Pupils who have learning difficulties and disabilities make good progress because they receive very good support. Consequently, standards at Aylesbury Grammar School are high. Pupils do exceptionally well in the national tests for 14 year olds. In mathematics almost a half of the boys achieved the highest level 8 last year. Most pupils gain at least five GCSE passes with good grades. Many boys achieve a good deal more than this and a very high proportion achieve the highest grades. Standards have improved in both key stages over time because the school sets challenging targets for each year group. Students' A level and AS level results are consistently higher than those attained nationally and the majority of pupils go on to higher education establishments.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Inspectors agree with the school that the personal development and well being of the pupils are outstanding. Pupils show a well developed moral sense, reflecting responsibly on issues and respecting the views of others. The school is a friendly community where most pupils feel at ease with one other and mix comfortably. Consequently, their social development is very good. Cultural development is strong, and in their work and conversation many of the pupils showed a deep appreciation of art, music, drama and literature. They have a good knowledge of world cultures although their awareness of issues in modern multicultural Britain is more limited. Spiritual development is satisfactory, with some effective opportunities to be reflective in lessons and assemblies.

Pupils expressed positive attitudes towards learning and to school life generally. This is epitomised by their very high levels of attendance and excellent behaviour. Pupils know what they have to do to lead a healthy life style and do not endanger themselves or others by the way they conduct themselves. They make especially good use of the extensive range of sporting and other extra-curricular activities available to them. Pupils acquire a wide range of skills, especially in literacy and numeracy, and good levels of knowledge to help ensure their economic well being. They are conscious of the wider community in which they live and make a positive contribution to it through their work in music and by supporting charities.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

The school judged teaching and learning to be outstanding in the sixth form and good in the main school. This acknowledged past weaknesses in the teaching of some subjects. These have been addressed rigorously. Consequently, inspectors judged teaching to be outstanding overall.

Lessons have clear objectives for learning. They offer a wide range of activities, have a brisk pace, and are planned to meet the needs of all pupils. The high calibre of teaching over time enables pupils to make good progress in their studies. This reflects the school's commitment to learning and is a testimony to the teachers' skills and their expertise. Pupils respond well to active methods such as role play in language classes. The high quality of the music and the obvious enjoyment of performing that were witnessed attest to the quality of instruction.

Teachers use questioning well to challenge thinking and check progress. However, sometimes more could be done to ensure that all students have the opportunity to respond to questions, for instance, by asking everyone to share their ideas with a peer initially. In some subjects teachers make effective use of self assessment, peer assessment and marking to help pupils judge their progress and consider how to improve, but this is not consistent across the school. Where it is done well, boys clearly understand what they are doing and what they need to do to improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school offers a balanced curriculum tailored to the needs of its pupils. Subjects include Japanese, Italian and classical studies. The application of information and communication technology across the curriculum is good. Pupils commented that they would like more opportunity to study practical subjects such as 'food technology' but the lack of facilities prevents this. An extensive range of extra-curricular activities includes a wide variety of sports, musical and cultural activities, charitable work, visits and foreign exchanges. There is an effective programme of careers guidance although there is no formal work experience below sixth form level.

Sixth form students have a good choice of traditional academic subjects and they generally express satisfaction at what is available. However, given the size of the sixth form, the overall range on offer is not large. The school chooses not to offer 'vocational' subjects, as these are available elsewhere. Students' education is enriched by 'complementary studies' which make a valuable contribution to their all-round personal development.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The quality of care provided by the school is good overall. There is a calm, purposeful and harmonious atmosphere around the school. Very good support is provided for the few pupils who have learning difficulties. Good links with external bodies ensure that support is available when needed. Child protection procedures are in place.

The school seeks to improve pupil care and continues to build on its strengths. Form tutors, heads of year, house and of 'section' all play a part in trying to ensure that no pupil 'slips through the net'. However, it is not always clear to parents where the areas of responsibility lie or who they should contact if a problem arises. Pupils are becoming more closely involved in monitoring their own progress and reflecting on how to improve, although they say that the extent to which they do this effectively varies between subjects.

Sixth formers undertake 'work shadowing' and receive high quality guidance and support as they prepare to move into higher education.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

The school judges that leadership and management are good in the school and outstanding in the sixth form. Inspectors agree with this judgement. The headteacher leads the school very well with effective support from all staff and governors. He has initiated a range of changes to improve provision and has developed a coherent approach to improvement at all levels. For example, systematic self evaluation systems are developing but the school recognises that this is not yet effective across all departments. The senior staff and governors are timely in considering increased security measures. The new buildings have greatly improved the learning environment.

Governors are well informed about the school: they know the strengths and areas for development and they challenge under performance where it exists. They are clearly focused on maintaining the school's high standards and have undertaken suitable training and development programmes to extend their skills.

Systems for monitoring the work of the school have led to a good understanding of what is going well, ensuring high standards are maintained and that areas requiring improvement are addressed. The improvement plan is clearly focused on relevant priorities. However there are few measurable targets or success criteria to help monitor the progress of the plan's actions. Although staffing is well matched to the needs of the school's strong academic curriculum, the development of middle leadership and management is a recognised area for improvement by the school. Subject leaders are showing an awareness of the usefulness of data in evaluating the performance of subjects, individual teachers and students. This work is at an early stage. Consequently, the tracking of individual pupil performance is inadequate. Whilst many parents and carers are supportive of the school, a considerable proportion of replies to the parental

questionnaire indicated that some feel the school does not seek their views or those of their children. Inspectors judge that procedures for addressing parental concerns need to be strengthened so that parents and carers feel the school is working in partnership with them and takes notice of their views.

Consistently high expectations of all who work in the school have contributed significantly to its success. Teaching and support staff are committed to the school and its academic focus. The effective leadership of the headteacher has laid firm foundations for the next planned phase in the development of the school. The school's capacity for improvement is good.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	1
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	Yes
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The behaviour of learners	1	
The attendance of learners	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	3	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	Yes

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Students

Thank you for the warm welcome you extended to us when we visited your school to carry out our inspection. We all found it a pleasure to meet and talk with you and to observe your learning in lessons and around the school. We were most impressed by your behaviour, your attitudes and your values. You cooperate extremely well with staff in lessons and do your part to keep the buildings impressively clean and tidy. We note that the school has plans for increasing security.

You are justifiably proud of your school. The headteacher together with his senior team and the governing body lead the school well. They ensure that you are taught well and give you a good all round education. Your academic standards are very high and overall you make good progress over time. Lessons are interesting and well suited to your learning needs. Many of you take advantage of the outstanding provision offered in the sixth form. We have, however, asked the school to make sharper use of the data they collect to enable staff to track the progress made by individuals more consistently, making your school even better. We judged that the school could seek your views and those of your parents more effectively in its quest for continuing improvement.

We agree with those parents who told us that the opportunities that are offered to you by your school are outstanding. Many of you are involved in music, drama and sport outside of lessons and even more of you are contributing both to the school and to the wider community in important ways. We were sorry that we did not have the opportunity to see your cabaret. The rehearsals sounded wonderful.

With best wishes

Catherine Munt

Her Majesty's Inspector.