



Aylesbury High School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 110494
Local Authority Buckinghamshire
Inspection number 288691
Inspection dates 30 November –1 December 2006
Reporting inspector Caroline Bolton HMI

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

Type of school	Grammar (selective)	School address	Walton Road
School category	Community		Aylesbury
Age range of pupils	11–18		HP21 7SX
Gender of pupils	Girls	Telephone number	01296 415237
Number on roll (school)	1263	Fax number	01296 388200
Number on roll (6th form)	369		
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr Trevor Toms
		Headteacher	Mr Alan Rosen
Date of previous school inspection	3 February 2003		

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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

Aylesbury High School is a large grammar school that has specialist status as a language college and is also a training school. After the age of 16, the great majority of the students choose to continue their studies in the sixth form. Relatively few students come from disadvantaged homes. The proportion of pupils who use English as an additional language is smaller than average, as is the percentage from minority ethnic groups. As in other grammar schools, the proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is well below the average. The students' attainment on entry is well above average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Aylesbury High School is a good school. Standards are very high and students make good progress, although there is scope to improve the achievement of a small minority of individuals during Key Stage 4. Teaching and learning are good, with some which is outstanding. However, the use of assessment in showing students how they can best improve their work is unevenly developed across the school.

The personal development of the students is a strength of the school. They have a good understanding of the importance of healthy lifestyles. They feel safe in school and most enjoy their education. They have a range of opportunities to take responsibility, to contribute to the community and to broaden their experience through a rich variety of extra-curricular provision. The school's language college status has a positive influence in terms of the range of languages available for study and the growing international links which are fostered by the staff. Students are well prepared for their future economic well-being. Care and support for students are good but the school does not fully meet the requirements of its health and safety policy.

Leadership and management by the school staff and by governors are good overall. The recently formed leadership team has a clear and coherent view of the school's direction. The school evaluates its work systematically and effectively. The great majority of the parents who responded to Ofsted's pre-inspection questionnaire were positive in their views of the school. It provides good value for money.

The school has addressed effectively the issues from its last inspection and has a good capacity to improve.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The school has an excellent sixth form. It is greatly appreciated by the students who value the efforts of the staff, not only in their teaching but also in the care and guidance which they provide. Standards in the sixth form are very high and achievement is outstanding. The school provides the students with an excellent range of subjects and enrichment activities. Sixth form students are highly motivated and actively committed to the life of the school and to the community. The school provides the students with excellent preparation, both for the world of work and for entrance to university.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that the use of assessment to show students how they can best improve their work is consistently effective in key stages 3 and 4.
- Improve the progress of the small minority of students whose achievement in GCSE is not as high as it could be.
- Ensure that the requirements of the school's health and safety policy are met in full.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

Standards are very high throughout the school and achievement is good. Standards at the end of Year 9 have been exceptionally high for the past five years. Impressively, most students reached or exceeded the higher Level 7 in mathematics and science in the Key Stage 3 national tests in 2006. Standards at GCSE improved in 2006. For the second year in succession all students attained five or more passes at A*-C grades. Overall, achievement in Years 7 to 9 is good with progress in science being particularly strong. Achievement is also good in Years 10 and 11 and no subject underperforms in GCSE. Most students, including the very small number with learning difficulties and disabilities and those for whom English is not their first language, make good progress. However, a few students underachieve. There is scope to raise achievement and standards further by targeting a small minority of very capable students to ensure even more attain A* or A grades, as well as the small number of students who may not achieve grade C or above across a number of subjects.

A-level results are exceptionally high, as a result of good and outstanding teaching and a strong sixth form work ethic. Almost all students go on to higher education with the majority being accepted by their first choice universities.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The students' personal development is outstanding overall. The majority have very positive attitudes to study and enjoy school, as their high levels of attendance and the numbers progressing to the sixth form indicate. Students spoke appreciatively to inspectors of the diverse range of activities available to them within and beyond the taught curriculum and of the opportunities they are given to contribute to the local community. Their behaviour is exemplary in the great majority of cases; even when teaching fails to engage their interest, misbehaviour and inattention are rare. They report that they feel safe in school, that it is a friendly community and that instances of bullying are rare. They listen courteously to teachers and peers alike and they show respect for the views of others. They understand the importance of healthy eating and of regular exercise. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall; they reflect in mature ways and take part in debate on current issues of concern. All Year 11 students take a GCSE course in citizenship, while all in Year 10 participate in active citizenship projects. Students are very well prepared for their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The inspection team agrees with the school's evaluation that the quality of teaching and learning is good. Typically, teachers have strong subject knowledge, are enthusiastic and use a wide range of teaching and learning styles. Lessons are well paced and teachers use questioning skilfully to challenge students. In the best lessons, they make very good use of resources, including information and communication technology, which enthuse and involve students. Relationships are a strength of the school; the ethos of respect between teachers and students and between students results in lessons in which students collaborate productively and learn well.

The effectiveness of guidance provided by teachers to students on how to improve their work is inconsistent between subject areas. Some students reported that they are not always clear about what they should do to raise the standard of their work. There are inconsistencies in the quality of the teachers' marking. The school's monitoring correctly identifies this issue as a developmental area to raise further the quality of teaching and learning. Some students were concerned about the uneven scheduling of homework over the course of the week.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The curriculum is outstanding. This is because a very rich and stimulating curriculum is offered to every year group and this is appreciated by the students. A broad choice of options is available in Years 10 and 11 and nearly all girls find that they can take the subjects which suit them best. The curriculum in the sixth form is excellent and provides an exceptional range of opportunities. The specialist language status of the school has had a positive impact on the curriculum, not least by increasing students' awareness of the diversity of different cultures. The school also offers a wide variety of extra-curricular activities and considerable efforts have been made to try to incorporate something that will appeal to everyone. The well-developed house system offers further exciting and stimulating opportunities for the students.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Highly committed staff provide effective levels of individual support and guidance for students, based on very careful analysis of progress and the identification of areas which are agreed with individuals as being in need of improvement. Support systems are bolstered by a strong network of peer support, such as 'maths buddying' and

subject clubs run by older students. The school draws effectively on the expertise available from outside agencies. In some classes pupils know their targets, which are specific and developmental, and teachers' monitoring of their progress is carried out regularly. However, this is not consistently the case. Staff expertise is high in child protection and procedures are secure. Careers guidance is good and has recently been revised to make greater provision for leavers who do not move on to higher education. There is a good range of measures to encourage students to adopt healthy lifestyles. However, the school has not met in full the requirements of its health and safety policy, specifically with respect to risk assessment and site inspection. Overall therefore, the work of the school in this aspect is satisfactory.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

The inspection team agrees with the judgements of the school that leadership and management are good overall and outstanding in the sixth form.

Following a period of change at senior level, the leadership team has recently been restructured and its members form a coherent unit. They have established a clear direction for the school, with appropriate developmental priorities. Systems for monitoring and evaluating the work of the school have been put in place and are developing well but there is some variation in the rigour with which they are implemented among the subject departments. There are, however, examples of very effective subject leadership.

The great majority of the parents and carers responding to the pre-inspection questionnaire had very favourable views of the school and the progress being made by their daughters. However, 12 per cent of those responding identified as a concern the degree to which the school seeks and acts on the views of students and parents. The school has productive relationships with external partners, including an increasing range of international links.

The governing body is active in support of the school. Governors are well informed about the school's progress and include among their membership a helpful range of expertise. The minutes of their meetings indicate that they monitor the work of the school carefully. The school does not, however, meet the statutory requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship and does not meet in full the requirements of its health and safety policy.

The school has addressed the issues from its last inspection effectively. Its capacity to make further 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	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	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	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
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?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3	3

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below 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	2	
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, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

On behalf of the inspection team, I should like to thank you for welcoming us to Aylesbury High School. We very much enjoyed meeting you and we are especially grateful to those of you who took time to talk with us about your work and other activities in school.

You told us many positive things about your school and about the quality of education you receive and we share your opinion that yours is a good school. You achieve very high standards in your work and the progress you make is good. In the sixth form, it is outstanding. Teaching and learning are good, the school curriculum is outstanding and you appreciate the very rich variety of extra-curricular opportunities which the school offers. You have very positive attitudes to study and your personal development overall is outstanding. Staff work hard to provide you with effective support and guidance. The school is well led and managed by the headteacher, the senior staff and the governing body.

We judge, however, that a minority of you could make even better progress during Years 10 and 11. We have asked the school to ensure that this comes about and also to ensure that the feedback you are given on your work is consistent in enabling you to understand clearly how to improve it in the future. We have also asked the school to make sure that all health and safety requirements are met.

With best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Caroline Bolton

Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools