

Amery Hill School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	116409
Local Authority	Hampshire
Inspection number	312297
Inspection date	6 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Peter Sanderson HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	927
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr J Hubbard
Headteacher	Rev S Crabtree
Date of previous school inspection	24 November 2003
School address	Amery Hill Alton GU34 2BZ
Telephone number	01420 84545
Fax number	01420 84137

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one additional inspector. Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: achievement and standards; care, guidance and support and the impact of this on pupils' personal development and well-being; aspects of teaching and learning, the curriculum and leadership and management. Evidence was gathered from the school's self-evaluation, published test and examination results, policies, minutes and other school documentation, observation of the school at work, interviews with staff and students, and parental and student questionnaires. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail but inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation form, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in the report.

Description of the school

Amery Hill School is an average sized secondary school. Most students are of white British heritage and the number of students whose first language is not English is well below the national average. The number of students eligible for free school meals is well below that found in most schools. The proportion of students with learning difficulties or disabilities is similar to the national average although the percentage with a statement of special educational need is well below average. The school achieved specialist status in music and information, communication technology (ICT) in 2004.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Amery Hill is a good school with outstanding features. A particular strength of the school is the excellent care, guidance and support provided for students. This makes a significant contribution to their outstanding personal development. They have a clear sense of right and wrong, they respect the views of members of the community and through the effective school council contribute to making the school a very pleasant place to learn. As one of the students said, 'It's a friendly school.' Students' work in music plays an important role in developing the positive relationships and creative learning environment in the school. It also has a significant impact on students' cultural and spiritual development. Students enjoy school, the vast majority behave very well and their attendance is above the national average. Students are polite and eager to help. They feel very safe in school and report that instances of bullying are rare and always dealt with swiftly. Arrangements for safeguarding children are fully in place and regularly reviewed. The highly effective links the school maintains with a large range of external agencies ensures that students, particularly those who are vulnerable, are extremely well supported.

Students enter the school with standards that are above the national average. They make very good progress during their first three years at the school achieving standards that are well above average by the end of Year 9. However, there was a decline in English results in 2007. The English department has taken effective action to address this issue and the school's tracking system indicates that standards are due to rise again in 2008.

Standards at the end of Year 11 are well above the national average. The overall progress of students through the school is good, although progress in Years 7 to 9 is better than in Years 10 to 11. The school is aware of this issue and some recent changes to the curriculum and improvements in the tracking of student progress are beginning to positively impact on students' achievement in these later years. However, there is a relatively large variation in the achievement of students between different subjects. This reflects an inconsistency in the quality of middle leadership within the school. Examination results in 2007 indicate that this degree of variation is being reduced but remains too high.

The overall quality of teaching and learning is good. However, there is variation in quality across the school with lessons ranging from satisfactory to outstanding. Teachers have good subject knowledge and plan lessons well around clear learning outcomes. There are good relationships in lessons and students are keen to learn. In many lessons a good range of interesting activities are used to engage and challenge students. Good use is made of visual resources, including digital projectors, to maintain pace in lessons and promote effective learning. Some lessons, however, are too teacher directed with students not given enough opportunity to develop their independent learning skills. In these lessons, the work is often not pitched at the right level for all students in the class. The quality of teaching is monitored well by senior leaders. Helpful advice is given to staff in order to improve their practice.

Students are set challenging targets that reflect the high expectations of senior teachers and staff. The progress of students towards these targets is regularly checked and monitored. Those students who are identified as underachieving are given effective support. This system of academic monitoring is having a positive impact on the progress made by students.

The curriculum is outstanding and meets the needs and interests of students extremely well. A broad range of both academic and vocational subjects is offered to students in Years 10 and 11. This choice is enhanced by a very good range of enrichment courses that are available for

more able students both within the school and at a local college. The breadth of vocational courses has also recently been increased through effective collaboration with local schools and colleges. These courses meet the needs of some students very well as evidenced by the fact that all students achieved at least one GCSE pass in 2007. The school provides an extensive range of trips, visits and after school sporting activities and clubs. As one parent said, 'We are particularly impressed with the wide range of after school clubs and opportunities for development in music.'

The headteacher provides the school with very clear and effective leadership that is focussed on improving the achievement and personal development of students. The positive impact of his leadership was appreciated by a number of parents in the parental questionnaire used during the inspection. He is well supported by the school leadership team. The school has good systems of self-evaluation that involve a wide range of stakeholders including parents and students. This ensures that the leadership team has an accurate view of the school's strengths and areas in need of development. The school improvement plan is well focussed on those areas that the school needs to address. The governing body is well aware of its roles and responsibilities. It provides the school with good and effective support and challenge. The issues raised by the previous inspection have been addressed and the school has good capacity for further improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Reduce the variation in student achievement between subjects.
- Increase the percentage of good and outstanding lessons.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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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
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
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
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	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?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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
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

13 November 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Amery Hill School, Alton, GU34 2BZ

Thank you for being so welcoming when we came to inspect your school recently. We met and talked with many of you, sat in some of your lessons and looked at work that you had done. Now that we have finished the inspection we wanted to let you know our findings.

We judged that your school provides you with a good education with outstanding features. We were impressed with the way that you all get on with each other and with your good behaviour and positive attitudes. You enjoy school and your attendance is good. Teachers and support staff in the school take extremely good care of you. You told us that you feel safe and that there are very few instances of bullying. You also let us know that if you are concerned about anything then there is always somebody to talk to and things are sorted out. Your student council plays an active part in making the school a better place to learn.

The quality of teaching is good and sometimes outstanding, helping you to make good progress in your learning and attain high standards in Year 9 and 11 tests and examinations. The school provides you with an excellent range of both academic and vocational courses to choose from in Years 10 and 11. This enables you study subjects in which you are interested. The school also offers a wide range of after school clubs and activities. Many of you were keen to tell us about the large number of sporting activities that you are involved in. It was also good to hear and see so many of you taking advantage of the many musical opportunities provided by the school.

Your headteacher and senior staff lead and manage the school very well. They want the very best for all of you. The range of opportunities they make sure are provided ensure that you leave school as rounded, responsible young people.

Although your school is very good there are a couple of things that could make it even better. Many of your lessons provide you with opportunities to be actively involved in your learning and activities are pitched at the right level for you. We have asked the school to ensure that more of your lessons are like this. We have also asked the leadership team to work closely with subject leaders to ensure that you achieve equally well in all the subjects that you study.

Thank you again and I wish you all good luck for the future.

Yours sincerely,

Peter Sanderson

Her Majesty's Inspector