

Aylesford School - Sports College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118882
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	313132
Inspection dates	20–21 May 2008
Reporting inspector	Susan Frater HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	860
6th form	101
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Peter Divall
Headteacher	Douglas Lawson
Date of previous school inspection	1 December 2003
School address	Teapot Lane Aylesford ME20 7JU
Telephone number	01622 717341
Fax number	01622 790580

Age group	11-18
Inspection dates	20–21 May 2008
Inspection number	313132

© Crown copyright 2008

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Aylesford School – Sports College is a smaller than average high school. Students' attainment on entry to the school is below average, and approximately 30% of higher attaining pupils from the local primary schools are selected to attend neighbouring grammar schools. The vast majority of students are White British. There are more students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities than average. The school was awarded specialist sports status in 2004. It provides joint sixth form provision within a consortium of four schools.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Aylesford School – Sports College is on a journey of improvement. From a legacy of significant underachievement, the school is now providing a satisfactory standard of education, and has the systems in place to reach a good level of performance.

For several years, Year 9 national tests and GCSE results have been well below average with students underachieving significantly in Years 10 and 11, particularly higher attaining boys. A combination of factors contributed to this inadequate performance in the past. These included long-term absence of staff, changes in the senior leadership team and massive disruption and demoralisation caused by building works. Effective self-evaluation by the new senior leadership team identified the need to monitor standards, set targets for students, introduce more suitable courses and improve teaching and learning, and students' attendance

Since September 2007, all these areas have been addressed by a complete transformation in the school's procedures and organisation, skilfully led by the senior leadership team. The dramatic change demonstrates that leadership and management at all levels now provide the school with good capacity to improve further. Central to the change has been the introduction of a whole-school system for regularly, and systematically, monitoring the progress of all students towards challenging targets. This tracking of progress has enabled the school to identify any underachievement and take action in good time before it affects students' achievement. As a result, achievement is now satisfactory, and standards are below, rather than well below, average.

Alongside the good focus on achievement and standards, the senior team has introduced effective systems for monitoring and addressing students' attitudes to learning and their behaviour and attendance. As a result, personal development and well-being, including behaviour, are now good. Attendance is satisfactory and improving because of more interactive and interesting lessons and students enjoy the many opportunities to contribute to the community and engage in sport activities. The investment in improving the quality of teaching and learning, which began prior to September 2007, has motivated students and staff. One teacher observed that she is 'more excited about teaching than she has been for years'. Teaching and learning are now good. However, difficulties remain in recruiting specialist staff in a few areas. The teachers who cover these posts are not supported by sufficiently robust schemes of work that ensure all students make good progress as they move through the school.

Specialist sports status is helping to re-engage students who were previously disaffected. It enhances the curriculum, noticeably in the emphasis given to developing awareness of safe and healthy lifestyles across subjects. It is also raising the achievement of a group of Year 7 pupils, the 'Excel' group, whose lessons are taught through the medium of sport. To meet the interests and aspirations of the students, the school has introduced vocational subjects in Years 10 and 11 and provides work-related learning through good links with other schools and colleges. While this supports students' future economic well-being, students' weak literacy and numeracy skills remain as barriers to their success.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

'Aylesford sixth form is a fun environment where you can work and achieve.' This quote from the students is supported by their good achievement. In Years 12 and 13, students achieve

well, particularly in double-award applied subjects such as business studies where results were above average in 2007. Students do not do so well in AS and A-level and single-award applied subjects where results are below average, although the numbers taking these courses are small to compare with national averages.

The students' personal development and well-being are outstanding. Students are confident, articulate and great ambassadors for the school. Their excellent interpersonal skills are due to the unique 'School, Community, Individual, Personal' (SCIP) scheme, which also aids applications for university and employment. Students frequently lead sporting and other activities in the main school and in local primary schools. For example, a student led a tutor group session for younger students on the theme of 'sorry seems to be the hardest word', which inspired animated discussion.

Teaching and learning are good and involve a blend of stimulating methods. In an applied business studies lesson, students were highly engaged in activities that involved independent working and, as a result, they made good progress. The curriculum is good and meets the needs of the students through the combination of vocational and academic courses. Students' progress is monitored and supported carefully, and guidance on future education and employment is effective. Leadership and management of the sixth form are good. The head of sixth form is passionate about the students' achievement. She has implemented effective systems for monitoring and evaluating outcomes and has identified clear priorities to improve the efficiency of the sixth form further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards for all students, including in the basic skills of reading, writing and numeracy.
- Ensure effective curriculum planning is in place, which focuses on the progression of learning for all students.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Year 9 tests and GCSE results in 2007 were well below average. GCSE results including English and mathematics were particularly low and students' underachieved significantly. Results were also well below average in the specialist subject. School data show standards have risen from well below to below average. As students' attainment on entry is below average, this represents satisfactory achievement. Students make good progress in many lessons but with a legacy of underachievement to overcome, their achievement over time is now just satisfactory. Students speak confidently and listen well, but their reading levels are lower and many write slowly and with weak spelling and grammar. The school has recognised these weak literacy skills as a key focus for the future.

The school has set realistic, challenging targets for 2008 and data suggest that they will be achieved, particularly in GCSE examinations. However, the full impact of the improvements made in recent months will not emerge until 2009.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

Students' personal development is good. The focus on raising expectations, as well as improving attendance and behaviour, has been effective in dealing with earlier disaffection by some students. The much improved monitoring systems have rapidly increased students' attendance, which is now satisfactory. The number of students who are persistently absent or late is also reducing well. Behaviour in lessons is good, and movement around the school is well ordered and generally calm. Students clearly enjoy their time in the school and say they feel safe. Any allegations of bullying, racism or poor behaviour are taken seriously and dealt with quickly and effectively. Students' understanding of the importance of adopting healthy lifestyles is well developed through personal, social, citizenship and health education. They eat healthily, drink plenty of water and participate in a wide range of sport.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. Pupils gain some awareness of multicultural societies through educational visits, and exploring issues of third-world conflict during lessons. Mixed-age tutor groups are beginning to provide time for personal reflection and consideration of wider spiritual issues, as well as promoting a stronger ethos of belonging in the school. Community involvement is good. Students respond well to the many opportunities to broaden their experiences through participation in sports, clubs, special events and charity fund-raising activities. They express their views and take responsibility for some decisions made through the school council. Their economic well-being is fostered soundly by work experience and citizenship programmes.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Lessons are calm and well organised and many students are attentive. Students enjoy learning, know how well they are doing and have positive relationships with teachers. Teachers share with students what they want them to learn and students know what level they should strive to achieve. Most teachers convey their enthusiasm for the work to be studied. In especially successful lessons, work is linked to topical issues and students appreciate its relevance to their present and future lives. An imaginative Year 7 lesson in information and communication technology (ICT) started with a skeleton to focus students' attention on health issues generated by computer use, such as repetitive strain injury.

Particularly in the vocational courses in Years 10 and 11 and the sixth form, teachers are skilful in getting students to think for themselves and to evaluate what they do. Teachers ask good questions which probe students' understanding, and then extend the replies with another question. In contrast, in a most effective Year 8 citizenship class, students wrote their own questions at the beginning of the lesson and prepared answers incorporating key words at the end. Teachers are good at checking that students understand subject-specific vocabulary. Marking is regular and generally useful, although it does not always guide students about how to improve their work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum has been extended imaginatively and tailored to meet the needs of different groups of pupils. For example, vulnerable students and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in Year 7 are taught many of their lessons by one teacher who is monitoring their progress carefully and adapting the work to their various needs. Specialist status is successfully re-engaging students, and boys in particular, in their learning. It is raising the aspirations and achievement of another group of Year 7 students, those in the middle attainment band, through an 'Excel' group. This group is highly motivated by the theme of sport which links their lessons. Among other things, awareness of keeping healthy is promoted through theme days, based on the Every Child Matters agenda, which contribute well to students' personal development. Participation rates in the extensive range of extra-curricular sporting events are high, and students enjoy leading sporting activities within the school and the community. A priority for the school is to cater for students who are not interested in sport, both in school and in extra-curricular provision.

To meet the needs of students in Years 10 and 11, the school has introduced vocational subjects and provides work-related learning through good links with other schools and colleges. However, there is insufficient emphasis on developing their literacy and numeracy skills.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Care, guidance and support for students are good. All the necessary checks to safeguard students are in place. A high level of commitment to inclusion and to pupils' welfare is evident, especially through the work of the pastoral support managers. Good use is made of a range of different agencies to provide additional support for the most vulnerable. Effective support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is given by adults with specialist skills in the classrooms. Academic monitoring is good and is used well to set challenging targets for students. However, the information is not yet used consistently to plan lessons. Parents are well informed of their children's academic progress through regular reports and consultation days.

The school takes care to ensure the smooth transition of students from the many different primary schools. Good guidance for Year 9 students has been developed in the light of the increased number of pathways on offer. Appropriate guidance enables Year 11 students to make informed choices post-16. The recently introduced mixed-age registration groups are seen by most pupils as successful. A well planned system of mentoring students who are underachieving, including individual interviews between senior staff and Year 11 students, is beginning to have a satisfactory impact.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The strong and cohesive senior leadership team has skilfully motivated staff and students to aspire to reach their best performance. While good progress has been made in addressing the legacy of significant underachievement, standards are below average, although students' achievement, currently, is just satisfactory. However, systems are in place to ensure achievement and standards continue to rise. Behaviour has improved, and the personal development of students is now good. This transformation is due to the clear vision and direction for raising achievement and standards, and improving attitudes to learning, that permeate across the school.

The well established line management structure empowers middle leaders through engaging them in effective self-evaluation and monitoring the quality of teaching and learning. As a result, staff morale is high. The use of challenging targets, and systems for tracking students' progress towards them, is driving up standards of attainment. The curriculum, now tailored to the needs of students and specialist support for targeted groups and individual students, and the effective use of the specialist sports status, promotes equality of opportunity for all students. Opportunities for learning are enhanced by effective links with other agencies and schools. The school has identified the need to develop further its communication with parents to provide them with advice about how to help their children. Governors have been instrumental in challenging the school to raise standards and they monitor students' progress in lessons and through the school's processes of tracking and setting targets. They are committed to the continuing improvement of the school, stating, 'We want to be here when the school is outstanding.'

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Inspection judgements

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

Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	3	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3	

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?	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 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	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	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	3	
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

22 May 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Aylesford School – Sports College, Aylesford, ME20 7JU

On behalf of the inspectors who visited your school recently, I should like to thank you for contributing to the inspection. We enjoyed meeting and talking to you in lessons and around the school. We have taken students' and parents' views into account in arriving at our judgement that the school has improved significantly and now provides you with a satisfactory education and good care and support.

The good leadership and management team, supported by the highly motivated staff and governors, is ensuring that the school continues to improve. There is evidence for this in the good provision that is now in place in teaching and learning, the curriculum, and the care, guidance and support you receive.

You told us how much you enjoy your lessons, the new school buildings and the good range of sport activities. We noticed your behaviour is now good, your attendance has improved, and that you are making good progress in many of your lessons. Your headteacher is aware that your parents would like more information about your progress in subjects and how they can help you to improve your work.

Your achievement is now satisfactory. To secure your good achievement, we have asked your teachers to:

- raise the standards you reach in the subjects and courses you take, including your standards in reading, writing and numeracy
- plan the work in your subjects and courses to ensure you all make good progress as you move through the school.

You can help by monitoring your own progress towards your subject targets to reach your personal best.

With best wishes for the future

Yours sincerely

Sue Frater Her Majesty's Inspector