

Aylesford School - A Specialist Language and Music College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	125744
Local Authority	Warwickshire
Inspection number	340832
Inspection dates	10–11 February 2010
Reporting inspector	Mark Phillips 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	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	928
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	150
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Richard Lyttle
Headteacher	Mr Steven Hall
Date of previous school inspection	4 November 2006
School address	Shelley Avenue Warwick Warwickshire
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. A fourth additional inspector was on-site for the first morning of the inspection, scrutinising the school's arrangements for safeguarding students.

The inspectors spent approximately 60% of available inspection time observing learning. This included observing 35 lessons, visiting three tutor periods and attending an assembly. Three of these lesson observations were conducted jointly with the headteacher and two senior leaders. HMI and the headteacher also made a series of short visits to another 11 lessons. Inspectors held discussions with senior and middle leaders, and the chair of governors. They also met with panels of students from Key Stage 3, Key Stage 4, and the sixth form. Inspectors looked at achievement data, the school's systems for monitoring the quality of teaching, teachers' lesson plans, and the specialist college plans. They also considered records on exclusions, attendance, racist incidents and bullying, as well as the school's strategies for promoting, monitoring and evaluating equality of opportunity and community cohesion. In addition to the survey of parents' views, to which 157 replies were received, a sample of 150 students completed a written questionnaire and a staff survey was also conducted. The headteacher helped to plan aspects of the inspection and accepted the lead inspector's invitation to observe inspection team meetings, including the final meeting where judgements were discussed and made.

- The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:
- Considering their prior attainment, how well do students achieve in their examinations at the end of Year 11 and in the Sixth Form?
- How well do teachers use assessment information to bring about improvements in students' learning?
- How well does the curriculum offer help students to achieve?
- How effective is the support for vulnerable students, as shown by their achievement and personal development?
- How good are the school leadership's strategies for bringing about improvement, including the monitoring of equalities and the promotion of community cohesion?

Information about the school

Aylesford is an average-sized school and sixth form. It has been a specialist language college since September 2002; it has had a second specialism in music since April 2007. Since the last inspection, when German was identified as underperforming, the school changed one of its lead language subjects from German to Spanish.

The majority of students, but not all, are from White British backgrounds and speak English as their first language. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is slightly above average, but the proportion known to be eligible for free school meals are slightly below average.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Aylesford is a satisfactory school. Students achieve results in line with national averages at the end of Year 11. In this respect, and through their learning in lessons, students make satisfactory progress given their starting points when they join the school. In all other areas of their development, including the personal skills that prepare them for their future lives, they make good progress. Students feel very safe in school; this is underpinned by good arrangements for assuring their security. The behaviour of many is superb; however, there are a small minority who do not behave as well, particularly in lessons where teaching does not engage or challenge them. Support for vulnerable students and those with special needs and/or disabilities is good, supported by good partnerships with external agencies. Parents are very supportive of the school. All members of the school community are treated fairly and with respect, although management systems for promoting equalities and community cohesion are not as robust as they should be.

There are a number of ways in which the school is improving through positive leadership from the headteacher and his senior team. They know the school well. Self-evaluation is good; the decline in the school's performance immediately after the last inspection was recognised and in the three years since there have been clear signs of improvement, particularly in mathematics. Attendance has improved, as has the overall effectiveness of the sixth form. Both are now good. Any underperformance in teaching has been identified and is being tackled effectively through professional support and development. All this gives confidence in the school's good capacity for sustained improvement. However, senior leaders recognise that relative weaknesses remain in the specialist subject areas. While there have been successes, including the provision of community activities and links with primary schools, standards achieved by students in modern languages are below expectations.

Overall, teaching at Aylesford is satisfactory; again, while there are examples of good and outstanding practice throughout the school, some of the least effective work seen was in modern languages. In some lessons, assessment information is not used consistently well enough by teachers to plan lessons that match the needs and abilities of all students. Participation rates in instrumental and vocal tuition have not risen significantly, despite active partnership work with and support for feeder schools. While the school buildings are kept in excellent order, there is limited evidence of specialist status beyond the individual departments, for example through multi-lingual signage and display. Similarly, not enough use is made of music to improve learning across the curriculum. Improving the performance and profile of these subjects is central to further improvements in overall standards, students' personal development, and whole-school

effectiveness as well as securing better than the present satisfactory value for money that the school currently offers.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Help students to achieve above-average standards in their examinations at the end of Key Stage 4, and in their learning in lessons by:
 - ensuring that all teaching is planned with a clear focus on students' particular abilities and with appropriate matching of challenge to students' individual needs, rather than solely on the activities to be completed
 - broadening the Key Stage 4 curriculum to include a wider range of vocational qualifications.
- Significantly increase the contribution that the specialist college subjects make to the school's overall effectiveness by:
 - ensuring that students' achievement in modern languages is raised significantly, both in relation to national standards and to their achievement in other subjects
 - securing students' increased engagement and enjoyment in modern languages lessons
 - increasing participation rates in music, particularly in additional instrumental and vocal tuition
 - raising the profile of the specialist subjects across the curriculum and throughout the school site.
- Revise the strategies for promoting equalities and community cohesion by:
 - ensuring, with leadership from governors, that the cycle of analysis, action planning, and evaluation of these strategies addresses the particular contexts of Aylesford School and meets all statutory requirements thoroughly
 - involving stakeholders from across the school community in devising and evaluating the success of these strategies.
- About 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Students join the school in Year 7 having attained average standards in their primary schools. Standards in GCSE examinations are also in line with those nationally, but are not yet firmly above-average in any major measure. Overall, this represents satisfactory progress, including for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Standards in mathematics have risen over the past three years and are now just above average. In English, standards have been more variable and are just below average. In 2009, most other GCSE subjects attained in line with national expectations although students' progress in individual subjects varied; standards in science dipped, and

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students underachieved in both French and Spanish compared to the standards that they achieved in most other subjects. Progress seen in lessons during the inspection was similarly varied and satisfactory overall. Good progress was seen consistently in mathematics; however, progress in modern languages lessons was, at best, satisfactory. In all aspects of their personal development, students make good progress. Attendance has improved, and is now good. It is not outstanding because more could be done to improve the punctuality and persistent absence of a very small minority. Similarly, while many students show exemplary behaviour in lessons and around the school site, there is a small proportion that requires occasional isolation or exclusion because they misbehave in lessons. The generally good attitudes to learning of many are reflected in the fact that this was the biggest concern of the students who took part in the inspection survey. Students feel very safe in school, a confidence shared by their parents. They have good attitudes to adopting healthy lifestyles and many make good contributions to the school community. They are well prepared for their future lives; basic levels of literacy, numeracy, and use of information and communications technology (ICT) are developed well. The majority of students have a basic understanding of a modern language. By the end of Year 11 most are mature, confident young people. Most have extremely good social skills, a strong moral code, and show good understanding of other cultures. Students from different backgrounds get on well together although opportunities are missed to further their spiritual development, particularly during tutor periods and in assemblies.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

In the best lessons, high expectations of the standards that students should achieve, an expert knowledge of their particular needs and a range of engaging tasks lead to excellent progress. In a Year 9 drama lesson, for example, students gained an excellent understanding about the purpose of internal dramatic dialogue through a combination of different group activities - including a more challenging task for the more able - and teacher-led discussion. Teachers have good subject knowledge and working relationships are generally positive. Overall, though, teaching is satisfactory because of variability in planning and assessment. There are examples of good marking, particularly in mathematics, and systems for tracking students' progress are well-established. However, this information is not used consistently by teachers to plan lessons that match the needs and abilities of students in their classes. Too many lesson plans and objectives are focussed on the completion of activities, rather than improving the quality of students' learning. In these lessons, this leads to a predominance of teacher-presentation from the front of the class, with students remaining passive for too long. This is particularly the case at the start of lessons and, in a few cases, leads to low-level talking and misbehaviour from a small minority. Students told inspectors that this was most often the case in modern languages lessons and this view was supported by inspection observations.

The curriculum meets all statutory requirements. A good range of extra-curricular activities enhances many students' classroom learning and enjoyment. There is well-established provision for developing students' literacy, numeracy and ICT skills, and all students take a qualification in religious education and citizenship in Key Stage 4. In other respects, however, the Key Stage 4 is rather narrow, being based largely on GCSE courses. Other qualifications, such as the Certificate of Personal Effectiveness, have been introduced. The BTEC course in physical education has also started recently but the school is aware of the need to widen the curriculum further, particularly through vocational qualifications.

Key to the good personal development outcomes enjoyed by students is the good programme of care, guidance and support. This starts with arrangements for ensuring that students settle in well when they join from primary schools, which parents and students told inspectors were very effective. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities are well cared-for. Targeted support in lessons by an effective team of teaching assistants helps them to achieve as well as their peers and move on successfully to further education or training.

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These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Well-organised management systems, including annual impact reviews of subject areas and pastoral teams, carried out jointly by middle managers and senior leaders, help the school to have a good understanding of its successes and areas for further development. These are presented through the Single Integrated Development Plan. Overall, this plan provides a clear vision for the school although in some cases the timescales and targets for the completion of initiatives could be articulated more precisely. Regular and appropriate programmes of professional development are provided for teachers, and specific support offered where needed. This has resulted in several instances of significant improvement, including in English. Underperformance in German, one of the lead specialist subjects, was tackled robustly and consequently changes were made to the teaching and curriculum provision. However, the school recognises that concerns remain, despite these changes.

There are good partnerships both with outside agencies and with parents, to promote students' learning and well-being. This was seen clearly in the well-attended parents-teacher consultation evening that took place as the inspection drew to a close. Procedures for making the statutory safeguarding checks are extremely thorough. Generally, the school site is very secure although the proximity of the playground to the single school entrance, the school car park and access road is not ideal. The sensible behaviour and supervision of students when they move from the school building to the playground at break-times helps a great deal, but there is clear need for the planned new access road and car park, to alleviate any risk. The school has some good partnerships with local community groups, and works hard to make the school itself a socially cohesive community where everyone has equality of opportunity. However, strategies for monitoring equalities and community cohesion are not as thorough as they should be. Specifically, they are not closely enough tailored to the specific and unique contexts of the school, are not evaluative enough, and they do not involve representative stakeholders. As these are statutory responsibilities, the effectiveness of the governing body is judged satisfactory. Nevertheless inspectors recognise that, in other respects, governors serve the school well and share the senior leadership's ambition for further improvement.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Sixth form

While the standards achieved are in line with national averages, both overall and in the proportion of higher grade passes, most sixth form students make good progress in their studies given their starting points when they join Year 12. This was seen in lessons, where good teaching and, in particular, good teachers' subject knowledge enables good learning. Nevertheless, there remain some lessons where there is not enough dialogue and debate between teachers and students. This is important because, as shown in an outstanding A Level biology lesson for example, such discussion helps students to develop their critical and thinking skills and to take risks when responding to questions. The sixth form curriculum is good; it is inclusive and encourages a good range of students to continue with their education through a wide range of academic and vocation options. Partnerships are well-established, including with the University of Warwick to support learning in mathematics. The strongest aspect of students' progress in the sixth form is in their development of the personal skills that will take them forward into higher education and careers. Inspectors met some exceptionally personable, mature young people who make significant contributions to the whole-school community. Many take on support roles, including in Key Stage 3 lessons where they are able to deepen their own understanding of learning processes as well as acting as good role models for younger students.

Effective guidance systems are in place to support students' learning and pastoral needs and their attendance is monitored carefully, including robust signing-in and out procedures. The sixth form is managed well; since the last inspection there has been a reorganisation of leadership responsibilities that has brought improvements in provision and outcomes for students. The sixth form development plan has a strong focus on

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further improving outcomes for students and correctly identifies areas for further improvement.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

Views of parents and carers

Parents who responded to the inspection questionnaire expressed very positive views of the school. Amongst concerns expressed by some parents, including in written comments that accompanied the questionnaire, were concerns about behaviour and the school's promotion of healthy lifestyles. Interestingly, these were also the two greatest areas of concern to the students surveyed by inspectors. These concerns were considered during inspection observations. Inspectors agree that there is a very small minority of students whose behaviour does not always meet the school's (and parents') high expectations, but the behaviour of the great majority is very good and, in some cases, exemplary. Senior staff act swiftly and firmly when misbehaviour is reported. Concerns about the perceived high cost of healthier food options in the school dining hall were discussed with the headteacher. It is not for inspectors to regulate such matters. However, inspectors did judge that students themselves have a good understanding about how to live healthy lifestyles.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Aylesford School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 157 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 928 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	61	39	89	57	5	3	1	1
The school keeps my child safe	56	36	96	61	4	3	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	41	26	98	63	12	8	3	2
My child is making enough progress at this school	50	32	93	60	10	6	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	46	30	101	65	4	3	2	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	47	30	96	62	10	6	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	28	18	106	68	19	12	1	1
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	43	28	97	63	8	5	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	47	30	101	64	5	3	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	48	31	86	55	15	10	3	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	28	18	99	64	14	9	4	3
The school is led and managed effectively	49	31	94	60	9	6	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	62	39	89	57	3	2	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
Type of school	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



22 February 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Aylesford School - A Language and Music College, CV34 6LA

I am writing to you now to let you know the results of the recent inspection. The school has been judged satisfactory overall. Your examination results are average compared with other schools and this means that you make satisfactory progress. Good features include your attendance, the way that you are kept safe, and the quality of the sixth form. This letter is for those in Years 7 to 11; our comments about the sixth form are in the full report, which I encourage students to read.

May I thank you for the extremely positive welcome that you gave the inspection team and, indeed, for the superb behaviour that many of you show in lessons and as you move around the school. These attitudes help to create a good environment for learning at Aylesford. We know that there are a very small number of students who do not behave as well in some lessons and that this is frustrating to those of you who are keen to learn. We have asked the school to use teachers' good subject knowledge to make sure that there is enough challenge, in all lessons, to keep everyone's minds fully focussed on learning and achieving their best. We have also asked the school to consider offering a wider selection of qualifications in Key Stage 4, particularly vocational courses to suit students with particular careers in mind.

We were interested to note the extra community classes and activities that have been developed through the school's specialism in modern languages and music. However, GCSE results in languages have not been as good as they should have been, given this specialism. We think that more could be done to improve your achievement in languages, and we have asked the school to make this a priority. Similarly we would like to see more of you taking the chance to learn an instrument or have singing lessons, as the school is also a specialist music college.

Finally, whilst we could see that Aylesford is a place where everyone is treated with respect, the school's systems for promoting equal opportunities and community cohesion require updating. Although this is something that the school governors must lead on, there is an important part that students with different backgrounds and experiences can play in shaping this important aspect of the school's work. I hope that when you are asked to you will do so willingly because, as was so evident to us, you

have some excellent personal skills and mature attitudes to offer.

Yours sincerely

Mark Phillips

Her Majesty's Inspector

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