

Aylesbury High School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	136846
Local authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	397477
Inspection dates	21–22 June 2012
Lead inspector	Clare Gillies

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

Type of school	Grammar (selective)
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Girls
Number of pupils on the school roll	1306
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	417
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Lucinda Bull
Headteacher	Alan Rosen
Date of previous school inspection	30 November 2006
School address	Walton Road Aylesbury HP21 7SX
Telephone number	01296 388222
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Email address	office@ahs.bucks.sch.uk

Age group	11–18
Inspection date(s)	21–22 June 2012
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Introduction

Inspection team

Clare Gillies	Additional inspector
James Coyle	Additional inspector
Niel McLeod	Additional inspector
Clifford Walker	Additional inspector
Jean Whalley	Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Years 11 and 13 had finished their examinations and were not in school though students from both years came in specially to meet the inspectors and discuss school life. On the first day of the inspection there were no classroom lessons because Years 7 and 10 students were involved in enterprise activities in school (observed by inspectors), Year 8 students studied geography, science and drama at Ashridge Forest (visited by an inspector), Year 9 students went to the Docklands and the Imperial War Museum at Duxford, and Year 12 students visited Birmingham University. Inspectors observed Years 7, 8 and 10 at work on the first day and 39 part-lessons, several of which were carried out jointly with members of the senior leadership team, on the second day. Inspectors saw over 50 teachers in lessons, tutor sessions and the activities.

Inspectors looked at students' work, the school's analysis of past performance and the improvement plan, records of lesson observations, and data related to attendance, safeguarding and current standards and progress. Inspectors took account of the on-line Parents' View survey in planning the inspection. They considered responses to the questionnaires from 222 parents and carers, 107 students and 82 members of staff. Meetings were held with students in all years as well as senior and middle leaders, members of the governing body and staff.

Information about the school

The school is larger than most with a large sixth form. It became an academy in July 2011. Very few students are known to be eligible for free school meals. Close to four out of five students are White British with the proportions of students who speak English as an additional language and from minority ethnic groups being close to those seen nationally; no one group represents more than 4% of the student population. An extremely low proportion of disabled students or those with special educational needs is supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs. The school has attained numerous awards including the International School Award, EcoSchools Green Flag and Investors in Careers. The school meets the current government floor standard, which sets minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

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

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	1
Achievement of pupils	1
Quality of teaching	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils	1
Leadership and management	1

Key findings

- Aylesbury High is an outstanding school. The sixth form is outstanding. Practically all students achieve extremely well and proceed to university, many with very high A-level grades. Equally noteworthy is that citizenship and similar subjects have a high profile so that students are very well prepared for their future lives and the social and moral issues they will face. Many students participate in non-academic activities, such as sport or music, and succeed, often at a high level.
- A parent wrote that her daughter said choosing the school was the best thing she ever did, which mirrors many other complimentary observations by staff, parents and carers. Students are very happy and feel completely safe at school; their attendance is very high, their behaviour exemplary. Girls are polite, kind and welcoming. They appreciate the wealth of opportunities the school gives them and respond by being attentive and are extremely keen to learn and succeed as demonstrated by their very positive attitudes to all that the school offers.
- Teaching is outstanding and teachers show high levels of commitment, whether preparing lessons, marking students' work or setting up extra-curricular activities, trips and visits. They enjoy teaching such receptive students who invariably contribute much to the outstanding learning in many lessons. Teachers use their excellent subject knowledge, combined with technology, to make lessons stimulating. A few do not always prepare work that matches students' different abilities, use questions to deepen students' understanding or let them assess their own or others' work often enough. Occasionally, some students lack confidence speaking to a whole class or making presentations.
- Outstanding leadership and management at all levels underpin the school's success. The headteacher has overseen an improvement in achievement and the quality of teaching since the last inspection. The curriculum and provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are outstanding, including in the sixth form. The school's training school status reflects the excellent, effective support given to teachers to improve their practice. Highly effective leadership of teaching and performance management, linked to

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outcomes, identifies skills which teachers share to generate improvements in teaching.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Deepen students' learning to raise standards even higher by ensuring all teachers:
 - plan open-ended questions that challenge students' thinking and then get students to extend their own or others' answers to questions
 - encourage all students to speak clearly, audibly and confidently when they answer questions, contribute to discussions or make presentations
 - give students more opportunities to evaluate their own and each other's work
 - consistently prepare work that matches students' different abilities.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Students enter the school with well above average standards. Parents and carers are confident that they make good progress and, in fact, they make outstanding progress in all years. Attainment has continued to be well above average since the previous inspection with a significant upward trend in the percentage of GCSE A* and A grades, which in 2011 was 80% or higher in 11 subjects. High A-level results have been maintained with 50% A* and A grades in 2011. Almost 80% of students attained the EBacc in 2011 and every girl attained at least five GCSE grades A* to C including English and mathematics. There is no difference in achievement by ethnic groups and the very few students receiving support for disabilities or special educational needs and those with slightly lower levels on entry, make exceptional progress, in line with other groups.

All Year 11 students stay in education, well over 90% of them in the school's sixth form. Only a very small number of Year 13 students go into employment rather than university. Students are particularly successful in gaining places to read medicine and the sciences. In all years, students achieve success in many others areas. In 2011, the school came second in the National Schools Athletics Championships.

Students enjoy learning and contribute greatly to the success of lessons. They are attentive, relish challenging tasks and, as one teacher put it, 'often go further than I was expecting'. This reflects their mature thinking and desire to explore the breadth of topics. Year 11 students learn more than is needed for GCSEs but they appreciate that this prepares them well for the sixth form.

Students' literacy and numeracy skills are excellent and they use them skilfully in other subjects. Year 7 students confidently used a range of computer software packages to tackle elements of their enterprise tasks and revealed their creativity by

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making imaginative items out of old plastic milk bottles. The next day they were just as enthusiastic in ordinary lessons, thoroughly enjoying using a range of skills in a challenging technology project to design a moisture tester.

Quality of teaching

Examples of outstanding teaching were seen in all years and in nearly all subjects during the inspection. Teachers' expert knowledge and enthusiasm for their subjects are key factors, combined with the mature and respectful relationships students have with them. Excellent demonstrations, in physical education or art for example, or efficiently prepared, thought-provoking experiments in science, ensure that students' attention is maintained throughout lessons. It is not surprising that close to 100% of parents and carers feel that their daughter is taught well; they are right. In all years, teachers skilfully encourage students to work and think independently by suggesting websites, relevant documents or possible lines of research.

What distinguished outstanding learning from good learning in lessons was often the quality and responses to teachers' questions. Questions requiring simple answers, or the teacher responding at length to answers, did not extend understanding, especially if other students could not hear what was said. Students were not always urged to explain or explore ideas further and to speak with confidence. Though teachers generally mark work in detail and assess work very well, just occasionally they do not match tasks to students' individual needs or suggest students assess their own and each other's work.

Even with students' fluency in reading and writing, teachers extend and reinforce their vocabulary well. Teachers support the very few girls with disabilities or special educational needs extremely well. Teachers use technology to make learning relevant, topical and fun. In Year 12 politics, a photograph of one US citizen generated excellent debate about the country's ethnic groups and recent news items got history and citizenship lessons off to a flying start. The specialist teaching of citizenship is a significant factor in the development of students' awareness of moral, social and cultural issues. In many other subjects, teachers link work to this aspect of students' personal development.

In the last couple of years, teachers and students, equally enthusiastically, have adopted an exciting, secure, social learning network. They access a virtual learning environment with materials and references and a forum where they can discuss ideas and keep in touch with each other and with students and teachers around the world. Students, particularly sixth formers, find it invaluable.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students are courteous, thoughtful and their behaviour is mature. During activities day, Year 7 students were sensible as they rushed to finish tasks being completed by team members in several different rooms. Year 10 students worked in a small space but managed to move between tasks smoothly. They supported each other

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cheerfully and thoroughly enjoyed the final presentations at the end of the day, listening attentively and with good humour. Parents, carers, staff and students all feel confident that behaviour and bullying are of no concern. The excellent behaviour seen in lessons and around the school and the school's records of a very small number of minor incidents confirm their views. All the parents and carers who completed the questionnaire said that their daughter feels safe at school and nearly every student confirmed this. Safety is emphasised in several lessons, such as physical education or science and students learn about, for example, road safety and first aid.

Students were adamant that bullying is extremely rare but are confident senior leaders or teachers would tackle it immediately and firmly. Students have an insight into many different types of bullying, from homophobic to cyber-bullying or name-calling to racist bullying. As one Year 11 student thoughtfully observed: 'It is our generation which must accept differences, particularly in family structures.' The school council has recently updated a practical and helpful leaflet on bullying which all students receive and in addition to the school council there are many other ways in which students take on responsibility and develop leadership skills. Students are generous, raising funds for charities, such as reading books for the blind, doing volunteer work in a local Women's Refuge or considering others through Amnesty International. An Eco-group leads on sustainability projects.

Leadership and management

The headteacher provides outstanding leadership and is extremely well supported by highly effective deputy headteachers, senior leaders and subject leaders who work in unison to drive the school forward and ensure that continuous improvement is at the heart of the school's work. The governing body has moved forward since the last inspection, particularly since the school acquired academy status. Governors visit the school regularly, contribute to the school's improvement plan and monitor progress towards objectives, make themselves available at parents' and carers' evenings and understand how they must blend support with challenge. Accurate self-reflection and a determination to keep moving forward, the school's track record of building on its many strengths and never accepting second best all contribute to the school's excellent capacity to keep improving; all staff know that the highest standards are expected at all times and they rise to the challenge.

Detailed analysis of assessments and examination results leads to action being taken where, for example, the percentage of the highest grades slips a little. Rigorous monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning generates action linked to performance management to ensure the highest standards are maintained. The excellent Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and support for teachers are recognised by the CPD award achieved in January 2011. The school continues to be a most effective training centre for new teachers; they receive outstanding guidance. Even teachers with many years experience benefit from advice and coaching when needed.

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School leaders ensure all safeguarding and child protection procedures and checks are meticulous and thorough and overseen regularly by the governing body. There is almost unanimous praise for the excellent pastoral and academic support and guidance students receive, including the very few with disabilities or special educational needs. Leaders and staff ensure that equality of opportunity is promoted throughout the school both academically and socially and any form of discrimination is not tolerated.

The constantly evolving curriculum is wonderfully rich and diverse, matching students' academic and personal development needs extremely well. When asked to remember really exciting things they had experienced at school, students of all ages came up with long lists, including making films in modern foreign language lessons, visiting a temple in religious education, house music, drama and dance events, activities days, memorable assemblies and trips overseas, such as to Washington or Kenya. External speakers regularly stimulate thought-provoking discussions for sixth formers. These and a plethora of other events and activities add much to students' excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and ensure diversity is celebrated and understanding of different cultures promoted in many subjects.

Excellent links have been forged with parents and carers and many praise the school's good levels of communication with them, particularly by email, although a small number would welcome more. Nevertheless, parents and carers are overall overwhelmingly positive in their support of the school and its leadership.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all 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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September to 31 December 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance:	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour:	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Floor standards:	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety:	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.



25 June 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of Aylesbury High School, Aylesbury HP21 7SX

Thank you for your warm welcome when we visited your school. We enjoyed meeting many of you and particularly thank those of you who came in specially during your examinations. Your school gives you an outstanding education and it was so pleasing to hear that many of you agree with us! We much enjoyed watching the enterprise activities taking place and seeing some imaginative things made from plastic milk bottles!

You and your parents and carers are right to appreciate your teachers' enthusiasm and expert subject knowledge and to value the wonderful opportunities you have both in lessons and in the numerous extra-curricular activities, trips and visits. You make rapid progress in all years and attain very high standards. We were most impressed with your mature and sensible behaviour and how hard you work in lessons. You seem to be happy and to enjoy being at school and it is clear that you all get on very well together.

Even in outstanding schools, it is often the case that a few aspects of teaching and learning could be even better. We have asked the school to check that all teachers a) plan open-ended questions to challenge your thinking and then get you to extend your answers, b) give you more opportunities to evaluate your own and each other's work c) prepare work that matches your different abilities so that you all work hard throughout lessons and d) encourage you to speak with more confidence when you answer questions in class or make presentations.

We hope that those of you taking examinations this summer will attain the very best grades and that all of you will have happy and successful futures.

Yours sincerely

Clare Gillies
Lead inspector

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