



QUALITY ASSURANCE REVIEW

REVIEW REPORT FOR
AYLESBURY GRAMMAR SCHOOL

Name of School:	Aylesbury Grammar School
Head teacher/Principal:	Mark Sturgeon
Hub:	Herts and Bucks
School type:	Academy Converter
MAT (if applicable):	N/A

Estimate at this QA Review:	OUTSTANDING
Date of this Review:	07/11/2018
Estimate at last QA Review	N/A
Date of last QA Review	N/A
Grade at last Ofsted inspection:	OUTSTANDING
Date of last Ofsted inspection:	11/02/2009



Quality Assurance Review

The review team, comprising of host school leaders and visiting reviewers agree that evidence indicates these areas are evaluated as follows:

School Improvement Strategies	OUTSTANDING
Outcomes for Pupils	OUTSTANDING
Quality of Teaching, Learning and Assessment	OUTSTANDING
Area of Excellence	NOT SUBMITTED
Previously accredited valid Areas of Excellence	N/A
Overall Estimate	OUTSTANDING

Please note that a Challenge Partners Quality Assurance Review is not equivalent to an Ofsted inspection, and agreed estimates from the review are not equivalent to Ofsted judgements.

1. Context and character of the school

- Aylesbury Grammar School (AGS) is a selective school for boys aged 11 -18. It is a larger than average school with a large sixth form. Pupils in Buckinghamshire primary schools sit a secondary transfer test in Year 6. Those successful in the test and applying to the school are admitted according to distance from the school. About 40 students enter the sixth form from other schools. There is some sixth form collaboration in a few subjects with the neighbouring girls' grammar school.
- The school was founded as a free school in 1598. It combines pride in its history with a clear strategy and vision for the future. The house system plays an integral part in the life of the school. All boys belong to one of six houses.
- The school works with a number of other schools locally, nationally and internationally. It is a member of several working alliances, for example the Boys' Academic State Schools group (BASS), the International Boys' School Coalition (IBSC) and the Grammar School Heads Association (GSHA).
- Students come from diverse backgrounds but the proportion of disadvantaged students is very small. The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is broadly average. Over half of the students are of White British origin. The next biggest groups are Indian and Asian. The proportion of students who do not speak English as their first language is below the national average. The proportion with special educational needs or a disability is much lower than average.

2.1 School Improvement Strategies - Progress from previous EBIs

- This was the first review for the school.

2.2 School Improvement Strategies - What went well

- The school motto of 'Respect and Aspire' permeates all aspects of school life. All who work at the school have the highest aspirations for themselves and for the other members of the school community. Their pride in the school, support for each other and enjoyment of their work, create an environment in which all are encouraged to flourish and develop.
- The house system is a fundamental feature of school life. It helps to create that sense of community which makes the school such a secure and happy place. Boys welcome the opportunities to mix with older or younger students, to take responsibility and develop leadership skills. Healthy competition between houses challenges the boys to excel in many aspects of school life.

- The academic curriculum is broad and balanced. Students have the opportunity to study at least two languages and all take at least one at GCSE. All study three separate sciences. A high proportion enter the EBacc although the school does not insist on this. Clear guidance is given to each student about appropriate choices and the curriculum is kept under review to meet the changing needs of different cohorts. At Advanced (A) level, choice is widened by some collaboration with the neighbouring girls' school. The number of subjects students study in the sixth form is related to performance at GCSE and personal choice.
- There is an exceptionally wide range of high quality extra-curricular activities on offer, especially in sport and the arts. The day is structured so that boys who travel a distance by school bus can participate at lunchtime. Some clubs, for example the geology club, were initiated by the boys themselves.
- Middle leaders have responsibility for monitoring and developing teaching and learning within their subjects and are given a large degree of autonomy. They feel well supported by their senior leadership line managers. New leaders are offered specific leadership training.
- All departments conduct their own self-evaluation and write their own development plans. School self-evaluation is rigorous and is informed by discussion with all key stakeholders including students. The school development plan reflects a constant striving for improvement. There is a clear vision for the future and an understanding of the power of innovation, for example in the strategic development of the use of technology and engagement in educational research.
- The school is a learning community and there is a collaborative approach to professional development. There are programmes on offer for teachers at different stages in their careers. Specific development opportunities are targeted to meet individual needs. Learning forums provide opportunities to share practice within the school. Teachers value the meetings they have had with practitioners from other schools. A new development is the engagement of staff in educational research projects. The learning from these will be evaluated at the end of the year and incorporated into the staff development plan.
- Good use is made of the strong networks of Alumni who provide support to the school in many different ways, generously contributing resources and giving of their time to share their experiences, knowledge and skills.
- In recent years, communication and partnership with parents have been strengthened. Attendance at parents' evenings and information evenings is very good. The use of 'google classroom' provides regular information to parents about the learning of their sons and the homework set.

2.3 School Improvement Strategies - Even better if...

...there was a clear and coherent strategy for the further development of the use of technology across the school.

3.1 Quality of Teaching, Learning and Assessment - Progress from previous EBIs

- This was the first review for the school.

3.2 Quality of Teaching, Learning and Assessment - What went well

- Learning is at the centre of everything the school does. In consultation with all key stakeholders, five key characteristics of the AGS Learner have been identified: Ownership, Motivation, Resilience, Innovation and Courage. The development of these skills and characteristics is embedded in teachers' planning. Students can talk readily about what these words mean and can identify the characteristics in their own learning.
- Students are enthusiastic about learning and curious to learn more. The classroom is a safe and environment where students are not afraid to ask questions or to make mistakes. There is mutual trust and respect so that teachers and students are fully focussed on the learning. In a Year 10 physics lesson students asked very challenging questions about light waves. In a Year 9 English lesson pupils were willing to take risks as they compared and contrasted the use of language in two very different texts.
- Teachers are trusted to develop their own teaching styles: there is no prescribed pedagogy. They are passionate about their subjects and use their strong subject knowledge to inspire and motivate their students. They know their students very well and use this knowledge to plan lessons which allow each individual to make progress. For example, in a Year 8 mathematics lesson the teacher had thought carefully about where a boy with specific needs would sit, and skilfully engaged him in whole class questioning before providing him with individualised support. In a Year 9 swimming lesson, a very able swimmer was coaching some of his classmates.
- Teachers sequence a variety of activities building on prior learning and using stimulating resources. Lessons move at a fast but appropriate pace and many teachers provide good opportunities for students to deepen and extend their knowledge. In most lessons seen there was a good level of challenge. Many teachers use questioning well to check understanding. Some skilfully question the students to challenge them to articulate and develop their thinking.
- Students are encouraged and supported to become independent learners. As one younger student said, 'It's more about taking the initiative here, and taking responsibility for your own learning'. Homework is linked to learning in class. Students are encouraged to engage in 'flip learning' so that they arrive in lessons ready to share their learning. In an A level French lesson, students were able to make highly articulate and sustained presentations in the target language. A level English students talked about how they regularly research and read appropriate articles which they hope to use in their future discussions.

- Each department has its own approach to assessment and marking. Teachers guide and support students throughout lessons, encouraging them to make improvements in their work. In an A level chemistry lesson, the teacher had devised a structured worksheet that enabled the students to evaluate their performance in a test and identify which areas they needed to work on further and how they would go about this.

3.3 Quality of Teaching, Learning and Assessment - Even better if...

- ...teachers used departmental assessment procedures and practices more consistently.
- ...the good practice in effective questioning within the school was more widely shared so that all teachers learned to seize opportunities to use questioning to probe and develop the thinking of all the students in the class.

4. Outcomes for Pupils

- Students enter the school with attainment which is well above average. Almost all students are from the higher prior attainment ability band. They make exceptionally good progress across all year groups and across the curriculum.
- By the end of Year 11 attainment is very significantly above average. In 2018 a high proportion of grades awarded were grade 7 or higher. The vast majority of students gained 5+ grades 9-7. The Progress 8 score was very significantly above average in 2017 and even higher in 2018. School assessment information indicates this will be sustained in 2019.
- A high proportion of students, much higher than the national average, achieve the English Baccalaureate.
- Challenging targets are set for individual subjects using the Year 11 information system (YELLIS). Value added for each subject is calculated. There is some slight subject variation. Results for each subject are scrutinised and analysed and action plans are put in place where leaders consider there is room for some improvement. The school is aware of the challenges which were faced by departments in the year when new examination specifications were in place.
- YELLIS targets are not automatically shared with the students. Instead they set their own aspirational targets. These are kept under review and progress towards them is monitored by staff. Mentors support students at risk of underachievement.
- The small proportion of disadvantaged students make better progress at GCSE than all students nationally and in 2018 made better progress than the cohort as a whole. The small number of students with special educational needs or a disability (SEND) made slightly less good progress than the average for all students.

- The school benchmarks its performance against local groups and aspirational competitors, for example through BASS. The school is 21/27 in attainment on entry on the BASS comparative scale but 6/27 in achievement at the end of Key Stage 4. This is evidence that students make exceptionally good progress in the school.
- There is a qualification requirement for entry into the sixth form and for entry into particular courses. A small number of students are supported in making alternative arrangements for continuing their education.
- At A level, students continue to build on the progress made at GCSE. The Advanced Level Information System (ALIS) is used to measure value added and overall is significantly positive. There is some variation between subjects. As with GCSE, results are scrutinised and analysed and action plans put in place if there is any cause for concern.
- Attainment at A level is well above the national average, with a high proportion achieving the highest grades. Almost all students passed all of their subjects. The school has identified that they consider there is the potential to further improve attainment at A level by reducing in-school variability.
- Students at all levels of the school read widely and often. They are highly articulate. They can discuss their learning and their experiences in a sophisticated, sustained and reflective way. They are encouraged to develop confidence and skills as public speakers and this was demonstrated by their leadership of assemblies during the review.
- Students are given strong support in preparation for the next stage in their education, employment or training. They are well supported with UCAS applications. They have expert careers guidance with talks and lectures on different career paths from visiting speakers including alumni of the school. They undertake work-shadowing and volunteer in the community especially in local primary and special schools. They have many opportunities to develop leadership skills as prefects, head boys and deputy head boys of the school and of houses and as mentors. A large proportion go on to University.

5. Area of Excellence

Not submitted for this review.

6. What additional support would the school like from the Challenge Partners network, either locally or nationally?

The school would welcome opportunities to visit other schools where teachers engage in educational research, and where there is a clear strategy for the development of the use of technology.

This review will support the school's continuing improvement. The main findings will be shared within the school's hub in order that it can inform future activities.