



## QUALITY ASSURANCE REVIEW

### REVIEW REPORT FOR AYLESBURY GRAMMAR SCHOOL

<b>Name of School:</b>	Aylesbury Grammar School
<b>Headteacher/Principal:</b>	Mark Sturgeon
<b>Hub:</b>	Aylesbury Vale
<b>School type:</b>	Grammar
<b>MAT (if applicable):</b>	Not Applicable

<b>Overall Peer Evaluation Estimate at this QA Review:</b>	LEADING
<b>Date of this Review:</b>	02/03/2020
<b>Overall Estimate at last QA Review (if applicable)</b>	OUTSTANDING
<b>Date of last QA Review (if applicable)</b>	07/11/2018
<b>Grade at last Ofsted inspection:</b>	OUTSTANDING
<b>Date of last Ofsted inspection:</b>	26/04/2006

## Quality Assurance Review

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

**Leadership at all levels** LEADING

**Quality of provision and outcomes** LEADING

**AND**

**Quality of provision and  
outcomes for disadvantaged  
pupils and pupils with additional  
needs**

**Area of Excellence (if applicable)** SIXTH FORM – The development of character and the support available whilst developing strong outcomes

**Previously accredited valid Areas of Excellence (if applicable)** Not applicable

**Overall Peer Evaluation Estimate** LEADING

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

## 1. Context and character of the school

Aylesbury Grammar School is a selective school for boys with 1326 students on roll including 399 students in the sixth form. Established in 1598 the school moved to its current site in 1907. In 1959 it became a boys' school and in 2011 converted to Academy status. The school is proud of its collaboration and works closely with Aylesbury High School and is a member of the Buckinghamshire Grammar Schools, the Boys' Academic State Schools group and the International Boys' School Coalition (IBSC). In November 2016 the school received the Exceptional School's Award from the Best Practice Network.

Aylesbury Grammar School takes boys from the top 35% of the ability range and some students travel a long distance to get to the school. 212 students have English as an additional language (EAL) and a small minority of students are disadvantaged and/or have Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

The headteacher joined the school in September 2014.

### 2.1 Leadership at all levels - What went well

- Leaders are clearly ambitious for their school. They seek to benchmark themselves against the best schools and therefore continually raise their expectations of what students can achieve. For example, leaders compare themselves to their aspirational neighbours. Data is used from the 13 Buckinghamshire grammar schools to identify departments in other schools where students achieve more highly, and practice can be shared.
- Leaders and governors are clear on their areas of priority. The development plan sits alongside department self-evaluation processes and subject action plans where necessary. The department review process includes gathering information from student forums, assessment reviews, learning walks and book scrutiny. This comprehensive process is evaluated by senior leaders throughout the year so that there is a strategic and holistic approach to any issues that might arise.
- Leaders place clear value on developing student leadership across all Key Stages. For example, when a member of staff responsible for house assemblies was off ill, the student leadership team took responsibility to organise and deliver assemblies. Sixth formers also regularly take assemblies and recent topics have included the psychology of happiness and developing character traits. Furthermore, students value the range of opportunities given to them to develop leadership skills such as junior and senior prefect and Year 8 buddies. Students felt leadership roles were meaningful and as a consequence, they were very

proud of their leadership roles within the school.

- The school has a comprehensive programme of professional development aligned to both the interests of staff and their need as determined by the appraisal process. Staff engage in evidence-based research practice and meet fortnightly to develop and share ideas. Teachers have carried out research on topics such as testing the links between extra-curricular activities and academic performance in collaboration with other partners such as the International Boys' School Coalition.
- Students say there is a very strong bond between themselves and teachers and that adults within the school are very supportive of them. Students feel safe to ask questions and engage well in teacher-led discussions – they feel heard and respected by teachers. For example, students told leaders that they needed greater support with accessing the written paper of the drama exam. As a consequence, more time was given to teaching this aspect of drama. Furthermore, leaders respond to demand and frequently ask students about their views on the curriculum. For example, they introduced A Level Psychology in response to what students said.
- Students highly value the opportunities offered by the school. For example, they enjoy participating in rugby and handball as well as music opportunities such as the concert at the Waterside Theatre to an audience of 600 people. One student commented that the concert had been the best evening of his life.

## **2.2 Leadership at all levels - Even better if...**

...None identified.

## **3.1 Quality of provision and outcomes - What went well**

- Staff plan the curriculum carefully to ensure both the academic progress of the students as well as developing well rounded individuals. The considerable breadth of the curriculum supports students in pursuing interests and academic success as well developing into model citizens. For example, staff teach Latin at Key Stage 3 to develop linguistic skill as well as engineering at Key Stage 4 in response to student demand. At Key Stage 5, staff ensure a curriculum that enables students to opt from more than 20 subjects. Furthermore, the school endeavours to protect the subjects with smaller student numbers such as music so that they can have breadth of choice. Therefore, students are excited by the curriculum and the sixth form is over subscribed.
- Subjects are carefully sequenced and taught by subject specialists. Subject leaders have clear rationales for the order in which subjects are taught and clearly take into account learning at Key Stage 2. Lessons build on prior learning and challenge students to think deeply so that knowledge is rapidly gained. For example, in a Key Stage 3 science lesson, students used their prior knowledge of

oxygen and hydrogen to discuss combustion. Furthermore, teachers modelled effective use of language and subject specific terminology. They have high expectations of the vocabulary students should use and consequently, students articulate complex ideas appropriately and assuredly.

- Students are very clear on what they need to do to improve. Assessment and end of unit tests are used to provide clear feedback to students on what they have understood well and what they need to do next. For example, because of the clear assessment systems in Key Stage 4 English lessons, students knew they had to be clearer about the author's viewpoint and different interpretations. Furthermore, the assessment system is constantly under review to make it more effective. For example, students told leaders that feedback routines within Key Stage 3 science were not consistent. As a consequence, processes were changed so that students are now clearer on what to expect when getting feedback from staff on progress.
- Teachers are very clear about how to ensure students know more and remember more. The teacher research teams within the school have used their investigations into knowledge retention and cognitive load theory to develop effective teaching strategies. As a result, teachers across the Key Stages regularly test prior knowledge and lessons are planned so that key concepts are appropriately linked and built on.
- The Progress 8 score of +0.52 indicates the effectiveness of the school. All staff contribute fully to the school and go above and beyond for the students within the school. For example, staff ensure that students can engage in many extra-curricular activities that take place during and after school and in the holidays. Furthermore, staff are unstinting in their support for the students and actively seek to develop their expertise through participation in the educational research groups and the school-working parties.

### **3.2 Quality of provision and outcomes - Even better if...**

...consistency in the quality of questioning across all teachers ensured the accurate and rapid assessment of all students and the development of subject knowledge.

### **4.1 Quality of provision and outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with additional needs - What went well**

- This is an inclusive school. In lessons there is no noticeable difference in learning between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students. Students openly discuss what disadvantage means but feel that all students within the school are treated equally by both their peer group and others.

- Feedback from parents, including those of disadvantaged students, shows that they are extremely supportive of the school. They recognise that the thriving house system nurtures the students to support them to overcome any disadvantage they may face. Furthermore, an inclusive culture ensures that pupils of all backgrounds are able to aim high. As a result, at Key Stage 4, disadvantaged students have outperformed their peers for the last two years.
- Staff target courses specifically at disadvantaged students who are underperforming in modern foreign languages, mathematics and English. This helps them to rapidly catch up where necessary.
- Leaders provide funds so that disadvantaged students can participate in extra-curricular activities to improve cultural capital and social relationships. Disadvantaged students say they enjoy these activities and students' high participation rates ensure they benefit as a result.
- Disadvantaged students do well at the school and go on to highly competitive universities. Where staff are aware, virtually all students go on to complete their university courses.
- The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) has ensured that highly effective communication systems are in place so that staff have the right SEND information to enable students to thrive in the classroom. Student passports and specialist assessment reports recommend appropriate strategies for supporting students in the class. The effectiveness of strategies is monitored by the SENCo to inform future planning. As a consequence, a positive Progress 8 measure of +0.31 exists for SEND students.
- Strong links with the local primary schools help to develop aspirations among the different disadvantaged communities to ensure they work hard to qualify in the secondary transfer test and receive a place at Aylesbury Grammar School.

## **4.2 Quality of provision and outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with additional needs - Even better if...**

...the best practice from the Year 12 communication intervention group was replicated lower down the school.

## **5. Area of Excellence**

### **Accredited**

**Sixth Form opportunities – the development of character and the support available, whilst maintaining strong academic outcomes.**

### **5.1 Why has this area been identified as a strength? What actions has the school taken to establish expertise in this area?**

The area was originally identified as a strength from the previous Challenge Partner review and from the Growing the Top programme.

The strong academic performance is partly due to the retention of high-quality subject specialists. These teachers know their specialist subject knowledge well. Their curriculum is clearly planned so that students not only understand the subject knowledge fully but how to apply it in exam questions. Teacher subject expertise is enhanced in collaboration with a range of high-quality partners including Aylesbury High School and the International Boys' School Coalition. Furthermore, staff engage in evidence-based research practice and meet fortnightly to develop and share ideas. The recently published school research periodical shows that staff thoroughly review existing research literature in order to choose the right sort of research to carry out in the classroom. Research methods often seek to control for other factors, such as the testing effect eliminated in the mathematics research trial that the school did. Recent research has included problem solving in mathematics, whole school literacy and the links between extra-curricular activities and academic performance.

Students receive individual feedback quickly. Small class sizes in many subjects, and high-quality pastoral support, mean that students are given quick and appropriate feedback when they need it. As a result, students are well prepared for their next steps. Furthermore, students new to the sixth form are very quickly inducted and settled through a well thought out transition programme which includes open evening, induction day, post results interview and student 'buddying'. The school holds an expectation that all students within the school get involved in enrichment activities and this ensures those new to the school very quickly get involved in the social opportunities available. As a consequence, new students very quickly make good progress.

The sixth form common room and study areas are at the heart of the school and this is deliberate to ensure that sixth formers are fully integrated into the school and not seen as a separate entity. Senior leaders expect sixth formers to perform purposeful leadership duties and be role models to the rest of the school. As a result, sixth formers regularly take assemblies and organise house competitions.

### **5.2 What evidence is there of the impact on pupils' outcomes?**

External progress measures would indicate the very strong performance of the sixth

form. The progress measure of +0.4 puts them as the top selective school in Buckinghamshire and one of the top boys' schools in the country. Furthermore, the reputation of the sixth form within the local area means that it is popular and oversubscribed. The sixth form maintains high retention rates for both Year 11 to Year 12 and from Year 12 to completion of the course. The majority of students go on to receive their first-choice places at universities with a significant number of students achieving places at highly competitive institutions.

### **5.3 What is the name, job title and email address of the staff lead in this area?**

Name: Lilla Venning

Title: Deputy Headteacher and Head of Sixth Form

Email: pvenning@ags.bucks.sch.uk

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

The school does not require any additional support.

**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.**