



## 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 Hub
<b>School phase:</b>	Secondary
<b>MAT (if applicable):</b>	Not applicable

<b>Overall Peer Evaluation Estimate at this QA Review:</b>	Leading
<b>Date of this Review:</b>	15/11/2021
<b>Overall Estimate at last QA Review</b>	Leading
<b>Date of last QA Review</b>	02/03/2020
<b>Grade at last Ofsted inspection:</b>	Outstanding
<b>Date of last Ofsted inspection:</b>	11/02/2009

## 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 students and students with additional needs**

**Area of excellence** Accredited - Staff Professional Learning and Development, incorporating an evidence-engaged Action Research Programme.

**Previously accredited valid areas of excellence** Sixth Form – The development of character and the support available whilst developing strong outcomes  
02/03/2020

**Overall peer evaluation estimate** Leading

*The Quality Assurance Review estimates are not equivalent to Ofsted grades. The QA Review uses a different framework to Ofsted and the review is developmental not judgmental.*

## 1. Context and character of the school

Aylesbury Grammar School (AGS) is a selective school for boys with 1336 students on roll, including 401 in the sixth form. The school has a rich history, dating back to 1598. More recently, in 2011, the school became a standalone academy. The school aims to be a leader in learning, with unparalleled breadth of opportunities within a caring environment. The school is proud of its past but positioned to define its future, with great emphasis placed on its core values, to 'respect and aspire'.

Despite the selective nature of the school, it is very inclusive and students' distance to home is a key criterion for entry. Thus, the school largely serves its local community. The school is proud to welcome boys of all ethnic backgrounds, and there is a rich cultural heritage. Approximately 5% of students are disadvantaged, while around 15% have English as an additional language (EAL).

The strong house system is a key characteristic, enabling students to mix across year groups in both academic and pastoral endeavours. The development of character is fundamental to the school. Through knowing and understanding each individual, not just through their academic achievements, AGS students flourish in all they do.

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

- Leadership at all levels is very strong. This includes student leadership which is a key feature of the school. The headmaster is relentless in his drive and enthusiasm. There is a very clear vision for the school's improvement which is clearly articulated.
- Senior and middle leaders are talented and driven. They have very high expectations of themselves, staff and students. Staff enjoy and appreciate a significant level of autonomy and value the trust that senior leaders place in them.
- The school is outward facing and there is strong collaboration with other schools locally and further afield. Cross-phase work through the Challenge Partners Hub provides the mechanism for teachers to improve their subject knowledge and pedagogy.
- Staff are highly aspirational and hugely invested in the school. Relationships are very strong, and students and staff feel listened to and valued. Students told reviewers how much they enjoy school, and they feel extremely well supported by the staff. One student said: 'We can always rely on them.'
- The house system is very well established and is a very effective vehicle for developing students' character and leadership skills. A vast range of enrichment activities is helping to build students' cultural capital.
- Curriculum review is central to the school's work. Subject leaders have thought carefully about how to sequence their curriculum plans so that students know

more and remember more. In lessons, it is clear that this is having a positive impact on students' learning.

- This year particularly, staff recognised the need to provide students with extra pastoral support. Staff went to great lengths to ensure that support was targeted to need, and that students' mental health was a priority. Post-lockdown, this important work is continuing. Students of all ages commented on the strength of pastoral support and how comfortable they feel asking for help.
- Leaders regularly seek parental feedback and act on it. For example, parent consultation evenings will now continue online as parents stated that they would prefer this.
- Expectations of teaching and learning are very high. Staff are able to be individual, within an empathetic accountability framework. Assessment is based on a philosophy of 'tight values, loose control'. This means that staff have the freedom to decide the best way to assess that students are learning the intended curriculum.
- The school is very inclusive. Everybody gets on well together. There is a real acceptance and celebration of the increasingly diverse school community.
- Careers education and guidance is very strong. For example, all students in Years 9 and Year 11 have an individual interview to help them make the best study choices for the following years.
- Students are proud of their school. Attendance is high, reflecting their thirst to succeed. The culture for learning is excellent. Learning explorations and student discussions show that they are making very strong progress through the curriculum.

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

...leaders succession planned for staff whose strong knowledge/skills may represent a single point of failure in the system in the future.

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

- Students benefit from a rich, varied and ambitious curriculum. All students have access to a wide range of courses at both GCSE and A level. The number of Year 11 students achieving the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) is consistently well above the national average. Careful guidance makes sure that students are on the right courses.
- The positive, disciplined climate for learning is the bedrock of the school's success. The warm and respectful relationships between teachers and students and between students themselves are testament to the hard work and team spirit of all the staff who have developed an excellent learning environment.
- Students are eager learners and therefore their behaviour in class is exemplary.

Students expect to be challenged. They are ambitious for their futures and aim for the very highest grades. Sixth form students gain the grades they need for their next steps, with most going onto university or degree apprenticeships.

- Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and are passionate about the subjects they teach. They skilfully plan lessons so that students' knowledge and skills build in a coherent way. Students are also able to make links across subjects. For example, Year 8 Latin students were able to articulate where they could use their skills in different subjects.
- Lessons are characterised by high expectations, where work is challenging. In the best examples of learning, teachers plan work which makes all students think hard, supported by high quality teaching resources. Teachers help students to recap and build on what they have learned previously. They devise activities which engage students and encourage them to work collaboratively. They test students' understanding with skilful and well targeted questioning.
- Teachers develop students' literacy skills by expecting them to write at length and with accuracy in all subjects. They are also encouraged to read frequently and thus broaden their vocabulary and comprehension skills. In lessons, teachers concentrate on developing students' understanding of subject specific words.
- Students are assessed at least four times per year to ensure that they have remembered and understood key knowledge. Leaders use this information to inform their planning and ensure that gaps in students' knowledge and skills are swiftly addressed.
- Over time, students' outcomes at GCSE and A-level have been above average across a range of subjects. Disadvantaged students and those with SEND have also made strong progress from their starting points. Teacher assessments over the last two years of the pandemic demonstrate that high academic standards have been maintained.
- A constant and relentless drive on professional development is central to the school's continuing upward trajectory. A menu of training opportunities is provided to meet the needs and aspirations of all staff members, resulting in a highly skilled and ambitious workforce who relish the opportunities they are offered to take on leadership roles.

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

...all teachers routinely used a range of strategies to probe for student understanding at all levels.

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

- Inclusion lies at the heart of the school's philosophy. There are low numbers of disadvantaged students and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The school has sensibly focussed on ensuring teachers deliver the highest quality lessons to all students. As a result, disadvantaged students and those with SEND achieve well.
- Expectations of disadvantaged students and those with SEND are as high as for their non-disadvantaged peers. The curriculum is the same for all learners and most are able to manage the work in class with little additional support.
- Form tutors know their disadvantaged tutees well. They have regular 1:1 conversations and tutors are able to broker extra support for disadvantaged students. This may include financial assistance for students to access the large range of enrichment activities which help to build their wider skills and grow their confidence. Examples include music lessons and gym membership. School-based research has shown that such support has a big impact on disadvantaged students' motivation in school.
- Leaders' forensic and regular assessment of students' work ensures that students quickly get the help they need to plug any gaps in their learning. Targeted students benefit from additional catch-up sessions, when appropriate.
- Pastoral care through the year and house systems is extremely effective. Staff know their vulnerable students and their families extremely well. For example, during the pandemic, staff delivered electronic devices to those in need. Mental health support was also provided and is continuing for those who have struggled with pandemic-related anxiety.

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

None identified

### **5. Area of Excellence**

Staff professional learning and development, incorporating an evidence-engaged action research programme.

**Accredited**

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

Professional learning has high priority. There are a number of strands which are incorporated into this high-quality provision.

The *Professional Learning Pathway* is designed to enable all staff, from career entry to expert, across teaching and support roles, to take ownership of their professional development and their career progression in order to support students better.

For the past three years, the Action Research Programme has enabled AGS to develop a platform for evidence-informed practice. Staff are guided through a research project of their own design, focused on either a pedagogical or whole-school priority, culminating in the publication of *Flagship*, the school's journal for evidence-based practice. The programme helps staff to acquire skills in data collection, action research design, methodology and ethics and to reflect on their practice. The research is shared with all staff in the Learning and Teaching Forum. Some staff have undertaken research at a global level. Impact has been seen in areas such as literacy, digital technology in the classroom, diversity and inclusion, and wellbeing.

A high proportion of teaching and support staff also participate in a number of staff working groups. Foci include literacy, careers, curriculum, diversity and inclusion, welfare and the development of character. These groups allow staff a voice in the school's development and provide valuable leadership opportunities. As a result, students benefit from up-to-date staff expertise.

As a lead school, AGS regularly runs development training for schools in the Aylesbury Vale Challenge Partner Hub. These include middle and senior leadership programmes, advanced coaching courses, and subject knowledge enhancement networks to support collaboration between primary and secondary schools in the Aylesbury area. Staff value the opportunity to work together and gain accredited qualifications.

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

There is robust evidence of the impact of the *Flagship* research on students' outcomes through the rigorous research methods and findings of each project. For example, the research project examining how a whole-school approach to literacy can benefit AGS students culminated in the appointment of a literacy coordinator, with all students in Year 7 and Year 9 now involved in a project motivating them to read for pleasure through the issue of a whole-year group reading book. Similarly, the findings of staff involved in working groups, such as the Action Committee for Equality, has contributed to a whole-school curriculum review of the extent to which individual departments include the histories and lived experiences of minority ethnic groups.



The impact of the leadership courses is evident in the course evaluations from the sessions over the last two years, with exceptionally high scoring across all of the different elements. In addition, these courses continue to be oversubscribed with staff keen to take up these bespoke professional development opportunities. At AGS, staff retention is also very high, suggesting the challenging professional opportunities contribute to the interest and variety of a professional career in the school. Feedback from the subject knowledge enhancement network also reflects the professional learning valued by staff, with curriculum familiarisation and increased knowledge surrounding transitions being the most significant benefit reported by staff, both of which impact upon students directly.

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

Vanessa Beckley, Assistant Headteacher (Professional Learning)

vbeckley@ags.bucks.sch.uk

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

None identified.

**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.**

**Schools can access the School Support Directory; the Challenge Partners online tool that enables schools to connect with other schools in your hub and across the national network of schools.**

**Schools can also attend Sharing Leading Practice events where schools showcase excellent and/or innovative practice. Sharing Leading Practice events allow school leaders with specific improvement needs to visit a school or attend an online webinar hosted by a school, with outstanding provision in that area.**

**Both the School Support Directory and the Shared Leading Practice events can be accessed via the Challenge Partners website.**