



QUALITY ASSURANCE REVIEW

REVIEW REPORT FOR
AYLESBURY GRAMMAR SCHOOL

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| Name of School: | Aylesbury Grammar School |
| Headteacher/Principal: | Mark Sturgeon |
| Hub: | Aylesbury Vale |
| School phase: | Secondary |
| MAT (if applicable): | Not applicable |

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| Overall Peer Evaluation Estimate at this QA Review: | Not applicable |
| Date of this Review: | 08/11/2023 |
| Overall Estimate at last QA Review | Leading |
| Date of last QA Review | 15/11/2021 |
| Grade at last Ofsted inspection: | Outstanding |
| Date of last Ofsted inspection: | 02/11/2022 |



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Quality Assurance Review

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

Leadership at all levels Not applicable

Quality of provision and outcomes Not applicable

AND

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

Area of excellence Not applicable

Previously accredited valid areas of excellence Staff professional learning and development, incorporating an evidence-engaged action research programme (15/11/2021)

Overall peer evaluation estimate Not applicable

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 over 1300 on roll. Most students continue their studies in the large sixth form where they are joined by around 30 from other schools. The school's history dates back to 1598 and is celebrated in all aspects of school life, particularly in the house system.

In February 2012, the school became a standalone academy. AGS is in partnership with the Astra School Centred Initial Teacher Training (SCITT) provider, which provides training opportunities for new entrants into the teaching profession.

AGS students hail from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds, with around a half from minority ethnic groups. Nearly a quarter are learning English as an additional language (EAL). The proportion of disadvantaged students (those eligible for the pupil premium) is well below average, as is the percentage with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

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'. Great emphasis is placed on its core values of 'respect and aspire'. The school received a School of Character Quality Mark Plus award in May this year.

In this review, leaders chose not to have estimates and asked the review to focus on their new initiative 'deliberate practice', involving strategies introduced into teaching and learning in September 2023.

2.1 Leadership at all levels - What went well

- The school benefits from a strong, cohesive and stable leadership team. Leaders have established a purposeful, supportive culture which is appreciated by staff and students alike. The leadership team and governors have established a clear vision and priorities for improvement, which are understood well by middle leaders. Students also have a very good understanding of and commitment to the school values.
- Leaders are not complacent and are constantly looking at how to improve further. They make good use of research and draw on their regular monitoring and surveys of, for example, views of students and parents. This approach resulted in the introduction of 'deliberate practice' in order to ensure that all elements of effective teaching and learning are embedded securely.

- 'Deliberate practice' has only been in place since the beginning of term but early signs are it is having a positive impact in lessons.
- Character education is a significant strength and has become, as one teacher put it, 'part of the DNA of the school'. Students benefit from a wealth of opportunities for developing character through, for example, the house system, assemblies, student leadership and extra-curricular provision. In lessons, students work collaboratively and respectfully. Students recognise and talk positively about the importance of character and shared a quote given by their headteacher that 'Grades get you the interview but character gets you the job'. New Year 12 students commented on the good manners expected within the culture at AGS.
- The school has developed very strong and well-received continuing professional development (CPD) provision, which combines a core offering and bespoke opportunities. For example, teachers can take part in the research forums involving around six projects per year. The findings are shared and used to inform practice. For example, a recent project on positive masculinity has helped students to reflect on male behaviour. Middle leaders were very positive about the range of CPD opportunities and the support they receive from leaders, resulting in increased confidence in their roles.
- New staff are very appreciative of how they are welcomed into the school so they immediately feel part of the team. Early careers teachers and trainees have regular meetings with mentors and useful weekly induction sessions. They find the weekly sessions about 'deliberate practice' valuable and one new teacher described it as 'about recognising the small things and doing them deliberately'.
- Close attention is given to staff and student well-being. Students said that they feel very well supported and staff praised the attention given to their well-being. The new attractive staff room is well used and appreciated, as are the many various staff clubs and activities. Changes to reporting requirements have also had a beneficial impact on staff well-being.
- Leaders are determined and rigorous in their strategies for continuous improvement. Drawing on research and evidence from their regular learning walks, lesson observations and surveys, they have considered how best to improve practice for the benefit of students. For example, responding to the EBI from the last QAR, leaders have successfully reviewed the approach to questioning in lessons.

- AGS is an outward facing and collaborative school where staff are very open to learning from others as well as to sharing their experience and knowledge. Leadership of the Challenge Partners hub and involvement in local, national and international networks have all been ways in which this has been achieved.

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

- ... teachers were given more opportunities to share practice between subjects and across the school.
- ... participation in extracurricular activities was monitored more closely to identify patterns of engagement among different student groups.

3.1 Quality of provision and outcomes - What went well

- AGS leaders have established an ambitious curriculum with a clear intent and well-sequenced subject planning. Students are offered a broad range of subjects in all key stages and most follow EBacc subjects with everyone studying three sciences and at least one modern foreign language. Students also benefit from a strong PSHE programme and they are well prepared for life beyond AGS and their next phase of education.
- The curriculum is enhanced by an impressive range of enrichment and extracurricular activities. The house system, which is a very important and influential component of AGS, provides further opportunities for students and helps to ensure that all are involved in enrichment activities.
- Relationships between students and with staff are a major strength and contribute to the calm, purposeful atmosphere in classrooms and around the school. Students behave well, are respectful and show a keen interest in lessons, as evidenced by their eagerness to participate and to ask and answer questions.
- Routines and expectations are clearly being followed resulting in a purposeful, learning environment. This was very evident in a Year 7 history lesson where the calm start and effective retrieval practice enabled students to build on their prior learning very effectively. In Year 8 Latin, a combination of embedded routines and digital technology contributed to an effective pace to learning.

- Teachers use a variety of skilful questioning techniques. This was very evident in a Year 11 English lesson where the teacher probed understanding in order to establish character similarities in the text they were studying. In most lessons, 'hands down' questioning, which is one of the 'deliberate practice' strategies, was used effectively so that all students were engaged and 'thinking hard'. It also enabled teachers to assess students' different levels of understanding and recall.
- The school benefits from having subject specialists in all areas and this was demonstrated by teachers' strong and accurate use of technical language in lessons. They draw on their knowledge to bring subjects to life, to go beyond the GCSE specifications and to relate learning to the real world.
- Teachers make very effective use of assessment for learning opportunities. They know their students well and are creative and agile in the way they refocus activities to address misconceptions and to offer further challenge to individuals where appropriate. This was evident in most lessons and contributes to students' excellent progress.
- Teachers often provide a range of activities that meet students' different needs as seen in a Year 10 science support set where students gained in confidence because of the well-scaffolded activities. In Year 11 mathematics, students made clear progress by being able to work at their own pace. In Year 10 geology, the teacher employed a video, demonstration and discussion that resulted in a 'lightbulb moment' for students when they compared smooth and rough stones.
- The school has identified the development of oracy skills and subject-specific literacy as strategies in 'deliberate practice'. Literacy is prioritised through subject-specific terminology in class, reading lists for year groups and whole-year reading books. Students are encouraged to speak in class and in house assemblies; they do so articulately and with confidence.
- AGS students achieve exceptionally well in external examinations. For example, the 2023 provisional Progress 8 score was well above average. The attainment of students on entry to AGS is above average, reflecting the selective nature of the school. There were no students with low prior attainment, but the small proportion with middle prior attainment achieved very well with Progress 8 well above average. Students with EAL outperformed others in the school.

- Outcomes in the sixth form are similarly impressive. For example, in 2023, over half of the examination entries were graded A or A*, well above average. Most students go on to attend their first choice of universities with significant numbers attending Oxford or Cambridge.

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

... there was greater consistency in opportunities for students to respond to teachers' feedback ('Dedicated Improvement and Reflection Time' - DIRT).

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

- AGS is an inclusive school where everyone feels valued. Staff go out of their way to support vulnerable students, including those who are disadvantaged or who have SEND.
- Provision for SEND is well managed and very effective. The coordinator (SENDCo) has provided engaging training sessions for staff, including presentations by students with SEND, which clearly resonated with staff. She has developed close links with parents through, for example, coffee mornings, a WhatsApp group and encouraging past parents to support new parents.
- Disadvantaged students and those with SEND are very positive about how easily they can seek the support on offer and are confident their needs will be met. Year 7 and Key stage 4 students spoke highly of the student support centre and how well the support team helped them both in the centre and when in mainstream classes.
- Vulnerable students enjoy school, feel looked after and secure. They think they are treated fairly and that teachers have high expectations of them; for example, students with SEND receive the same challenging tasks as their peers.
- Disadvantaged students do very well at this school. Comparison data collected each term on attendance, behaviour sanctions, attitudes to learning and school reports show there is little difference between the performance of these students and their peers. In the 2023 examinations, disadvantaged Year 11 students achieved particularly well, with Progress 8 above that of their more advantaged peers.

- Disadvantaged students are supported in a number of concrete ways, for example, with equipment and revision guides. They also benefit from the wide variety of clubs and trips, most of which are subsidised for disadvantaged students.
- The school has a personalised and effective approach to monitoring and engaging with disadvantaged students. For example, tutors meet with each disadvantaged student twice yearly to consider their progress and extra support. Tutors get to know students well and understand their needs. In addition, the leader contacts the parents of each student to hear their views and share relevant information.

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

... leaders considered how to further identify and develop support for those vulnerable students who do not quite meet designated criteria (such as for SEND and pupil premium).

5. Area of Excellence

Not applicable



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Following the QA Review

The review report is primarily for the school's internal use to support the school's continuing improvement. However, we encourage you to share the main findings with your hub/hub manager so that they can support your hub's activity planning. Challenge Partners will also collate and analyse report content to create an aggregate picture of what is going on across the sector each year.

For further support following your QA Review, 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 (SLP) 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. (<https://www.challengepartners.org/>)

Finally, following the QA Review, schools may find it useful to refer to research such as the EEF toolkit to help inform their approach to tackling the EBIs identified in the report (<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/teaching-learning-toolkit>)