

QUALITY ASSURANCE REVIEW

REVIEW REPORT FOR
AYLESBURY GRAMMAR SCHOOL

Name of School:	Aylesbury Grammar School
Headmaster:	Mark Sturgeon
Hub:	Aylesbury Vale Hub
School phase:	Secondary 11-18
MAT (if applicable):	N/A

Overall Peer Evaluation Estimate at this QA Review:	Leading
Date of this Review:	10/11/2025
Overall Estimate at last QA Review:	N/A
Date of last QA Review:	08/11/2023
Grade at last Ofsted inspection:	Outstanding
Date of last Ofsted inspection:	02/11/2022

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 Leading

Quality of provision and outcomes Leading

AND

Quality of provision and outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and/or pupils with additional needs Leading

Area of excellence Accredited

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 Leading

Important information

- The QA Review provides a peer evaluation of a school's practice in curriculum, teaching and learning, and leadership. It is a voluntary and developmental process, and the peer review team can evaluate and offer 'peer evaluation estimates' based only on what the school chooses to share with them.
- The QA Review estimates are not equivalent to Ofsted grades. The QA Review uses a different framework to Ofsted and the review is developmental not judgmental.
- The QA Review report is primarily for the school's internal use to support the school's continuing improvement. If you choose to share this report, or extracts thereof, externally (e.g. on your website or with parents), please ensure that it is accompanied with the following text:

Challenge Partners is a charity working to advance education for the public benefit. We are not a statutory accountability body. The QA Review does not audit schools' safeguarding or behaviour policies and practices. However, Lead Reviewers and visiting reviewers are expected to follow Challenge Partners' safeguarding policy and report any concerns as set out in the procedures.

1. Context and character of the school

Aylesbury Grammar School is a selective school for boys with 930 students in the main school. In addition, the school has a large sixth form with more than 400 students. Most boys continue their studies into the sixth form, where they are joined by over 40 students from other local schools. The school has a rich history dating back to 1598, which is celebrated in all aspects of school life, particularly in the house system. In February 2012, the school became a standalone academy. The school is in partnership with the Astra Teaching School, which delivers training opportunities for new entrants into the teaching profession.

Student backgrounds are wide-ranging, with over half from ethnic minority groups. Almost a quarter are designated with English as an additional language (EAL). The proportion of disadvantaged students is well below average, as is the percentage with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

The school strives to 'give every student, irrespective of background and circumstance, an opportunity to flourish'. This is underpinned by 'a promise of unparalleled opportunities', with the school placing great emphasis on its core values to respect and aspire both individually and collectively.

2.1 Leadership at all levels - What went well

- The headmaster has established a clear, research-driven vision that shapes a culture of courageous curiosity, inclusion and academic ambition. Leaders and governors share this vision, and together they promote innovation, encourage staff autonomy and ensure that character development is held in equal regard to academic excellence.
- Governors provide informed challenge and support through structured committees and designated roles, sustaining a healthy dialogue that drives improvement.
- Leaders prioritise the development of teachers' subject knowledge and pedagogy through research groups, deliberate practice and professional enquiry. Staff are empowered to trial new approaches, supported by departmental development plans and coaching partnerships. This approach strengthens consistency and confidence. One teacher previously used educational research to redesign the history curriculum to better reflect students' ethnic backgrounds.
- Programmes of study are completed through carefully sequenced curricula that build on prior learning. Retrieval practice is embedded to ensure students remember more and apply knowledge with confidence. Leaders maintain curriculum breadth and find innovative solutions, such as shared A Level classes with neighbouring schools.

- Subject leaders play a key role in shaping curriculum intent and implementation. They adapt whole-school policies to suit subject needs and lead departmental self-evaluation cycles. Their autonomy, framed by a consistent accountability system, ensures subject-specific improvements are well targeted.
- The climate for learning is calm, purposeful and built on strong routines and mutual respect. Leaders are visible and model the behaviours they expect, fostering high challenge in a low-risk environment. Staff report feeling valued, well supported and proud to work at the school.
- Community engagement strengthens learning and belonging. Parents contribute actively through fundraising and partnerships, resulting in improved facilities such as the new 3G pitch. Leaders also ensure strong primary links, including transition visits and summer programmes that help Year 7 students settle quickly.
- Curriculum enrichment is extensive, with a wide range of clubs, competitions and character-building opportunities rooted in the house system. Social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is deliberately planned, including an impeccably observed reflection on Remembrance Day.
- Extra-curricular take-up is high, with diverse activities that support friendships, belonging and personal interests. For example, students described forming new friendships through rugby during house competitions.
- Personal development and well-being are central to the school's ethos and culture, promoting resilience, reflection and responsibility, nurtured through supportive pastoral systems and dedicated curriculum time. In one Year 12 personal development lesson, students confidently discussed their self-reflections on their own character growth.
- Pupils understand their role in modern Britain through inclusive curriculum content, equality-focused initiatives and opportunities to explore diversity. They speak confidently about how the curriculum reflects their identities and broadens their understanding of society.

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

... the drive for upward convergence continued to be addressed through the modelling of effective practice.

3.1 Quality of provision and outcomes - What went well

- The curriculum is ambitious, inclusive and accessible to all learners, developing academic rigour, leadership and personal growth. Students engage with opportunities to lead through the house system, assemblies and prefect roles, which foster belonging and aspiration.
- Curriculum planning is coherent and consistent. Lessons follow established routines that support retrieval, reflection and independence. Teachers use structured questioning and deliberate practice to build knowledge over time. In

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Year 12 physical education, students recalled and linked prior learning on the cardiovascular system to new content, demonstrating cumulative understanding.

- Reading is a key priority across the school, supporting learning in all subjects. Whole-year book studies promote shared discussion, and all Key Stage 3 English lessons begin with ten minutes of independent reading. Reading clubs broaden interests, and Year 6 students receive a summer reading book before joining, establishing early expectations.
- Teachers display strong subject expertise and maintain their knowledge through research and collaboration. They engage in professional development projects and use current evidence-based practice to enhance learning. In history, for example, teachers used online textbooks and structured materials to promote independent study of World War II leaders and life in West Africa before the commencement of the slave trade.
- Teachers model language precisely and promote accuracy in speaking, listening, reading and writing. Technical vocabulary is embedded, with students taught to use subject-specific terms confidently. In food technology, students learned terminology such as offal, game, and trace nutrients, directly linked to GCSE expectations.
- Students recall and apply content effectively through retrieval practice and questioning. Teachers use recall tasks to strengthen long-term memory and link new knowledge to prior understanding. In Year 7 Spanish, randomised questioning enabled all students to recall key vocabulary and grammar accurately.
- Teaching materials are high-quality, accessible and adaptable. The use of scrapbooks to capture current issues relevant to A Level economics encouraged creativity and engagement, while digital platforms in science allowed students to work independently across a range of applications.
- The level of challenge is appropriate and demanding, encouraging independence and resilience. In geography, directed improvement and reflection time (DIRT) tasks prompted self-evaluation and ownership of learning without relying rigidly on mark schemes.
- Teachers know their learners well and adapt instruction accordingly. In an A Level geography lesson, the teacher reframed a question and allowed additional thinking time to support a student with additional needs.
- Students are well prepared for the next stage of education. Careers guidance is personalised, with clear pathways to A Level and university. Sixth form students who transferred from other schools felt welcomed through structured seating plans and team-building days.
- High-quality learning extends beyond English, mathematics and science. For example, in personal, social and health education (PSHE), Year 7 students discussed fake news critically, demonstrating mature reasoning.
- Historic outcomes are significantly above the national average at GCSE and A Level, with students developing detailed knowledge and skills across the whole curriculum.

- High expectations are embedded across classrooms. Students respond positively, take pride in their work and demonstrate independence, as seen in Year 9 geography, where books were exceptionally well presented.
- Relationships are strong, respectful and supportive. Students feel safe and valued, knowing how to seek help when needed. Teachers foster trust through encouragement and praise, evident when Year 7 students expressed confidence in approaching pastoral staff for support.
- Behaviour, attendance and engagement are excellent, with persistent absence halving over the last academic year. The school continues to invest in proactive systems, family partnerships and pastoral care, ensuring students' wellbeing and readiness to learn every day.

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

- ... exemplary pedagogy and practice continued to be shared across the school to ensure outcomes remain consistently high.

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

- Leadership of provision for disadvantaged students and/or students with additional needs is strategic and proactive. Leaders ensure equality of opportunity through early identification, strong relationships and ongoing review. Every disadvantaged student meets individually with their tutor or with the pupil premium lead at least termly to identify barriers and review progress, with personalised plans recorded and updated.
- Parents are well informed through communication explaining eligibility for funding, which has encouraged more families to come forward.
- Leaders ensure that students in receipt of additional funding have agency in deciding how this can be used to help overcome specific barriers to learning. One student explained how they had used some of their funding to purchase the revision guides they needed.
- Leaders plan to expand the support for disadvantaged students and /or those with additional needs by employing an extra team member, as well as making further use of the improved external support services.
- Teachers know their students well and plan deliberate interventions, including seating arrangements, adapted resources and additional adult support. In a Year 10 computing lesson, a student with additional needs received extra help through the use of a mini whiteboard and front-row seating, removing barriers to participation. Teaching Assistants (TAs) are deployed effectively, and adaptations are evident in lessons across subjects. In food technology, a TA supported one student individually, enabling them to thrive through tailored help and positive relationships. Adaptations also extend beyond classrooms;

the admission criteria have been adjusted to allow greater access for previously looked-after students and disadvantaged students, increasing the diversity of intake.

- Progress and attainment for disadvantaged students and those with additional needs are closely scrutinised, with outcomes reflecting strong progress from starting points. Regular reviews and strong tracking systems enable leaders to measure progress effectively and adapt provision when needed. This monitoring ensures gaps are addressed early. One Year 13 student spoke about the consistent support they had received since Year 7, describing how it had developed both their learning and organisational skills.
- Behaviour and attitudes among disadvantaged students and/or students with additional needs are highly positive. The inclusive culture and emphasis on belonging and character promote engagement and motivation. Strong relationships between staff and students create trust and confidence, as seen in a range of lessons where respect and humour strengthened participation.
- Disadvantaged students and/or students with additional needs feel safe, supported and included, and parents report high levels of satisfaction and agency through regular coffee mornings and peer support groups. These relationships underpin excellent behaviour and foster a calm, purposeful learning environment for all students.

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

... N/A

5. Area of Excellence

Evidence-informed research for impactful outcomes and professional development

Accredited

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

The school's commitment to the sustained and strategic embedding of a research culture is evident in its prioritisation of research within the school development plan, ensuring that research underpins key areas such as learning and teaching and behaviour. The culture is championed by dedicated staff and supported by a robust, impactful programme that enables both staff and students to undertake meaningful research projects. These projects not only inform pedagogy and policy but also drive

school improvement and innovation. The replicable framework offers valuable insight for other schools seeking to enhance their own practice. The school's approach is further validated by ongoing investment, rigorous self-evaluation, and external benchmarking, all of which ensure that research continues to inform and improve practice. The impact is tangible, with evidence-informed projects leading to improvements in student wellbeing, curriculum inclusivity, and teaching practice. The school's leadership in evidence-informed practice is also recognised externally, as demonstrated by its role as a hub for conferences and partnerships, and its influence on other schools through shared resources and collaborative events.

The school has taken a series of strategic actions to establish and sustain expertise in research. A dedicated leader of research oversees an annual research programme, now in its eighth year, supervising both staff and student projects. Research is a priority at all levels, with senior leaders retaining strategic oversight and staff contributing through working parties and individual initiatives. The school has invested in infrastructure, including a dedicated research hub and a bursary scheme to recognise and support researchers. The annual whole-staff research forum and the Flagship journal showcase findings and foster collaboration within and beyond the school. Staff regularly engage with evidence-informed practice through initiatives such as deliberate practice, policy reviews, and external benchmarking. The school's research is continually monitored and evaluated, with impact reviewed annually and accountability ensured through presentations to governors and the trustees of the school's foundation. Externally, the school shares its expertise through networks and partnerships, supporting other schools and contributing to national conversations on education. These actions collectively position the school as a leader in research-informed practice, ensuring ongoing innovation and improvement.

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

The school's research programme has positively influenced students' outcomes by strengthening student belonging and wellbeing through research on positive masculinity, transitions, friendship, and leadership. Curriculum changes, such as ethnomathematics and increased representation of ethnic minorities, promote equality and inclusion. Literacy initiatives and the appointment of a literacy lead have improved reading and oracy. Classroom studies have enhanced teaching practice, while student-led projects have developed skills and shaped policy, including the creation of 'Give it a go' week. A rigorous self-evaluation process, including departmental reviews and student voice, further supports ongoing improvement and positive outcomes for students.

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

Katrina Blunt, Leader of Flagship Research, kblunt@ags.bucs.sch.uk

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 content reports from across the partnership of schools and trusts including using AI tools to create an aggregate picture of what is going on across the sector (sharing these with the partnership) each year. The QA Review reports remain confidential to Challenge Partners and the host school. This ensures that schools embrace the review as a development process, acting as a catalyst for their ongoing improvement. This is the primary purpose of the QA review. However, our aim is that the thematic analysis will demonstrate the additional value of a sector wide overview, illustrated with real-life examples.

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 partnership of schools. The School Support Directory 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>)