

# Aylesbury Vale Academy

Paradise Orchard, Aylesbury, Bucks, HP18 0WS

**Inspection dates** 16–17 September 2014

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	<b>Requires improvement</b>	<b>3</b>
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Early years provision		Good	2
Sixth form provision		Good	2

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Students in the secondary school do not attain as well as most students nationally or make as much progress as they should in English and mathematics.
- Not enough teaching is good or better in the secondary school. Some teachers do not have high enough expectations of what students can achieve.
- Leaders, including some subject leaders, and governors have not brought about improvements in teaching and achievement quickly enough.
- Attendance is not good enough. It is below that in most schools and has not improved.
- Behaviour in lessons is not consistently good. There is some low-level disruption and attitudes to learning are not consistently good.
- Plans for school improvement are not specific enough. They do not always make clear how much improvement is necessary for achievement and teaching to be good in the secondary school.
- Assessment of students' progress and attainment in the secondary school is not externally checked rigorously enough.

### The school has the following strengths

- The principal has fostered a caring and aspirational ethos which characterises the whole school. Consequently, there is a clear sense of purpose and a determination to raise standards in the secondary school.
- The programme of work (curriculum) is broad and balanced, with a clear moral emphasis that promotes equality, fairness and democratic values.
- The primary school is good. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make good progress and develop the key skills needed for Year 1.
- The sixth form is good. Students, including those who are disadvantaged, make good progress, and are well prepared for higher education and the world of work.
- Disadvantaged students in the secondary school are beginning to catch up with their classmates and with students nationally.

### Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 45 lessons, seven of them jointly with school leaders.
- Inspectors looked at students' work and case studies of individuals. They looked at the frequency and quality of marking and the progress students made.
- Meetings were held with three groups of pupils, three members of the governing body, including the Chair, and senior and middle managers.
- Inspectors took account of the 44 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and 97 staff questionnaire responses.
- Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at a number of documents, including: the school's self-evaluation and development plan, the school's information on students' current progress, and records relating to monitoring, behaviour and attendance, and safeguarding.

### Inspection team

John Mallone, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Glen Goddard	Additional Inspector
Brian Netto	Additional Inspector
Michael Sutherland-Harper	Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- Aylesbury Vale Academy provides for all age groups. It includes an average-sized secondary 11–16 school. Since it was last inspected, it has expanded to include a new primary school which currently has pupils up to Year 3. The Academy is led by the principal. There is a separate headteacher for the primary school. There is also a part-time executive principal, who is a National Leader of Education.
- The school is jointly sponsored by Buckinghamshire County Council and the Church of England Diocese of Oxford.
- There are almost equal proportions of students from White British and minority ethnic backgrounds. Approximately a third of students speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs, including those with a statement of special educational needs, is above average.
- The proportion of students eligible for the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for those in care and those known to be eligible for free school meals, is high.
- The school uses the services of Aylesbury College and Aylesbury Youth Motor Project to provide part of the education for 33 of its Key Stage 4 students.
- The school does not meet the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress by the end of Key Stage 4. It does meet the interim minimum standards for sixth form students.
- There have been many staff changes since the previous inspection. A home-school liaison officer has recently been appointed.
- The school has recently appointed two new senior leaders with responsibility for teaching and learning, and for student leadership.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Make teaching in the secondary school at least good and in line with that in the primary school and sixth form, and eliminate low-level disruption in lessons by:
  - ensuring that all teachers have high expectations of what students can achieve
  - making questioning more effective in improving students' learning and understanding
  - ensuring that all teachers adapt learning according to students' understanding.
- Strengthen the quality of leadership and management, and raise students' attainment and rates of progress in the secondary school by:
  - making sure that rigorous plans for improvement are more sharply focused on students' achievement
  - providing training for less-effective subject leaders to enable them to carry out their responsibilities more effectively
  - ensuring that teachers' assessment of students' progress and attainment is more rigorously checked and verified externally
  - increasing rates of attendance for all students so that they are at least in line with those for similar schools.

### Inspection judgements

The leadership and management

require improvement

- Leaders have not improved the quality of teaching in the secondary school quickly enough. The rapid staff turnover in recent years led to a lack of continuity in students' learning. As a result, they have not achieved as well as they should. Staff turnover has now stabilised.
- Leaders have not brought about sufficient improvements in behaviour in the secondary school. As a consequence, the pace of learning is too slow in some lessons.
- Plans for school improvement in the secondary school, including those at subject level, do not relate closely enough to students' progress and achievement. As a result, it is not always clear how much progress has been made towards set targets.
- The principal has high expectations of staff and students, and has led the drive to raise standards by personal example. Along with recent changes in personnel at senior level, this new sense of purpose has contributed to increased rates of progress for students currently in the secondary school. Leaders ensure a good quality of education in the early years provision, in Years 1–3 and in the sixth form.
- There are good procedures for monitoring students' progress and reporting this to parents. As a result, when students fall behind, effective programmes are put in place to help them catch up.
- Work is assessed regularly and its accuracy is checked internally. However, there is insufficient use of external verification of assessment in the secondary school. As a result leaders are not secure in their judgements about the standards students achieve.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced, and increasingly provides students at all levels with courses matched to their learning needs and abilities throughout the school. It has been extended in the sixth form to meet students' aspirations, with a recent increase in the number of academic courses alongside vocational ones that have been successful in the past. The curriculum promotes a tolerant and respectful community throughout the school.
- Impartial guidance on courses and employment is provided for students from Year 8 onwards. This is most effective in the sixth form. In 2014, all students who left the school were either in education, employment or training.
- The school's middle leaders are highly committed to ensuring that students make good progress. They are at differing levels in their capacity to bring this about. Leaders ensure that the school meets all current regulations on the safeguarding of children.
- The school has used the pupil premium well to help support the progress of disadvantaged students, and the gap between their progress and the progress of others is beginning to close.
- The school has rigorous procedures in place to manage the performance of teachers. These procedures are clearly linked to the national Teachers' Standards. If teachers do not reach their performance targets, pay rises are withheld. The programme of training for teachers is improving and now responds more closely to their individual professional needs.
- Students who receive part of their education at Aylesbury College or Aylesbury Youth Motor Project achieve well and gain useful qualifications. Their attendance, behaviour and progress are closely monitored by the school.
- The primary school sports funding has been used well to improve the coaching skills of teachers. Participation has increased and there is a wider range of sports on offer. Action taken contributes well to the school's work to enable pupils to adopt healthy lifestyles.
- The school's ethos makes a strong contribution to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students. Equality of opportunity is promoted through all the school's work. Students are well prepared to understand the changing nature of British society and to take their place in it.
- The school receives useful support from the diocese and local authority through the executive principal and School Improvement Partner. This support is helping leaders to check and improve the quality of teaching, with positive impact shown in the primary school and sixth form.
- The fact that teaching is improving and that students currently in the school are making better progress demonstrates that the school has the capacity to improve further.
- **The governance of the school:**
  - Governors are an integral part of the school. They were part of the group which formed the original vision for the academy and have strongly supported its development. They have received training in safeguarding and the interpretation of achievement information compared to other schools locally and nationally. This training is helping them to push for further improvement. They oversee the performance management process, including that of the principal. This helps them know which areas of teaching are still in need of improvement. They play an active role in overseeing the finances, including the use of the pupil premium funding, to ensure these pupils make more rapid progress.

**The behaviour and safety of pupils****require improvement**

- The behaviour of students requires improvement. Over time, high levels of serious incidents and fixed-term exclusions have prevented the school from becoming a fully cohesive and harmonious community.
- Behaviour in lessons is generally good and the vast majority of students are willing to learn. However, low-level disruption sometimes occurs, especially when teaching fails to match the learning needs of the students.
- Behaviour around the school is also generally good, although some students are boisterous when moving between lessons or at lunchtime.
- Behaviour and attitudes to learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage, Years 1 to 3 and the sixth form are good.
- Most students take pride in their appearance and in the presentation of their work. A small amount of litter is dropped at break and lunchtime. No graffiti was seen during the inspection.
- Bullying is uncommon and the systems in place deal with it effectively. Students report that poor behaviour is dealt with well.
- Racist incidents have been carefully logged and dealt with effectively. Almost all students cooperate well in class and mix well together socially.
- Students respond well to the rewards system which helps maintain the good behaviour of most students.
- Attendance is below the national average for similar schools and shows little sign of improvement. Persistent absence has been high for the last three years. The recent appointment of a home-school liaison officer and referrals to the school's own educational welfare officer are intended to address this weakness, but it is too soon to evaluate the impact of the actions taken.
- The behaviour of students receiving part of their education off-site is good. They enjoy their vocational placements and make good progress.
- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Procedures to keep children safe from harm are good. Access to the site is strictly monitored and all visitors are vetted. There is a rigorous programme of checks in place to ensure that only well-trained and suitable staff are appointed.
- The school works hard to protect those children who are at risk of harm. It keeps cases under constant review and cooperates well with other agencies.
- Students feel safe at school and understand how to keep themselves safe there and elsewhere, including when they are online.

**The quality of teaching****requires improvement**

- Teaching is not consistently good or better in secondary school, with the result that students do not attain as highly or make as much progress as they should. However, in the primary school and the sixth form, teaching is good. Teaching at the off-site placements is good.
- Teachers do not always have high expectations of what students can achieve. As a consequence, work is sometimes pitched at too low a level or at the same level for all. This means that students sometimes find work either too hard or too easy, which in turn can lead to low-level disruption in some classes. In the primary school, work is more closely tailored to learners' needs and achievement there is good.
- The quality of questioning is too variable in the secondary school. In some classes, teachers ask questions which do not challenge students enough. For example, occasionally, one-word answers are accepted by teachers who do not ask students to explain how they have reached their answer when explanation is necessary to assess students' understanding. This means that gains in knowledge and understanding can be superficial. In some lessons, teachers ask students to justify their responses, which helps extend students' literacy skills as well as developing their understanding.
- Some teachers do not adapt their approach when students do not understand. This slows the pace of learning considerably and can also lead to disruption. Other teachers continually check understanding and adapt the learning intended, so that students maintain interest and make greater progress.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge. Those with high expectations challenge students by using subject-specific terms to explain ideas. For example, in a Year 11 German lesson, the teacher used the term 'past participle' to explain the difference between the simple past and perfect tenses. This enabled students better to understand the concept, both in German and in English.
- Teachers make good use of material resources to aid learning. For example, in a Year 9 English lesson, the teacher projected a student's writing on to the interactive whiteboard so that other students could label it to demonstrate which features it demonstrated. This gave students pride in their work and led to a

deeper understanding of the concepts being taught.

- The focus on literacy skills, especially in the primary school and in Years 7 and 8, is contributing to increased rates of progress for those students currently in the school. In the secondary school, there has been insufficient guidance to parents about how they can support their children's literacy.
- The teaching of mathematics in the secondary school has improved in recent years, leading to substantial increases in students' progress. There is still inconsistency in the way number is taught across different subject areas. Parents are not given guidance about how to support their children's numeracy. Mathematics is taught well in the primary school.
- When students fall behind, there are good systems in place to ensure that they receive the help they need to catch up. Teaching assistants provide useful additional support to the students in their care.
- Training for teachers is increasingly well matched to their professional needs. This has contributed to an improvement in teaching over time and continues to do so. There is good and outstanding teaching which the school uses to help raise the overall standard by demonstrating best practice to less-effective practitioners.
- Teachers mark work regularly and use a helpful system which encourages students to make necessary improvements.

### The achievement of pupils

### requires improvement

- Students enter the secondary school from other schools with below-average starting points. In their GCSE examinations in 2014, 38% of students gained five A\* to C grades including English and mathematics. This is below the government's floor standard of 40%. However, students currently in Year 11 are on track to achieve better.
- Progress in the secondary school is not good. In 2014, most students did not make the nationally expected rate of progress in English or mathematics. However, students currently in Year 11 are making progress at a faster rate. Those lower down the school are making even better progress. The school no longer enters students for GCSE examinations prior to Year 11. This means that more have a better chance of achieving their potential.
- White British students make progress that is below the nationally expected rate. However, students who speak English as an additional language and those of Pakistani heritage make good progress. Their positive attitudes to learning make a strong contribution to this.
- The attainment of disadvantaged students is lower than that of other students nationally. The latest figures (2013) show that they were almost a grade behind in both English and mathematics in their GCSE examinations. Only 30% of them achieved five A\* to C GCSE grades including English and mathematics compared with 67% of other students nationally. In 2014, fewer disadvantaged students gained five A\* to C grades at GCSE including English and mathematics compared with their classmates. In English, they were, on average, about a sixth of a grade behind. In mathematics, the gap was over a grade. However, disadvantaged students in the current Year 11 are on course to make better progress in English and in mathematics, and to achieve considerably higher grades overall than in 2014.
- The most-able students in the school make progress that is in line with national levels for similar students. Their rates of progress have accelerated in the last two years. In part, this is due to better attitudes to learning in groups of higher ability students and an increased focus by teachers on tracking their progress, providing more challenging work and broadening the range of enrichment opportunities.
- Most disabled students and those who have special educational needs, including those with a statement of special educational needs, make similar progress to that of their classmates.
- The Year 7 catch-up funding is used well so that most of those who enter the school below nationally expected levels in literacy and mathematics make good progress.
- In the Early Years Foundation Stage, children start at levels below those typically found nationally. They make good progress so that by the end of Reception the large majority reach the early learning goals in reading and in writing.
- In the primary school, progress is good. In Years 1 and 2 in 2014, results of the phonics screening check (sounds and the letters they represent) were above nationally expected standards. Achievement was good overall in reading, writing and mathematics in Key Stage 1.
- Achievement in the sixth form is good. Students enter the sixth form with below-average starting points shown in their prior GCSE results. They make rapid progress so that they leave the school with academic qualifications that are in line with those of similar students nationally and vocational qualifications significantly better than average. In the sixth form, there is very little difference between the achievement of disadvantaged students and others.
- Students who attend courses off-site make good progress and achieve useful vocational qualifications.

**The early years provision****is good**

- Strong leadership from the headteacher with a clear focus on high-quality teaching means that from below typical starting points on entry to the school, children make good progress throughout the early years provision. Their reading, writing, mathematical and communication skills are all developed so that they are well prepared for Year 1.
- School leaders have a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. They have planned well for the training needs of staff for this age group.
- The school accurately assesses the skills of children on entry and provides suitably challenging experiences for them so that they learn rapidly. Their progress is carefully monitored on a regular basis to enable learning programmes to be adjusted to take account of individual needs.
- Teachers and teaching assistants are well trained and work together well to create a harmonious learning environment where all are treated with equal respect. They have high expectations and children respond well to these.
- Children enjoy school, display positive attitudes to learning and are well behaved. They are able to tell right from wrong and mix well together socially. Close relationships with parents and carers help reinforce positive attitudes.
- Safeguarding and child protection procedures are consistently implemented and children feel safe.

**The sixth form provision****is good**

- Students achieve well in this well-led sixth form. There have been recent changes to move from largely vocational options to a more balanced provision of academic and vocational courses. A change of entrance requirements, coupled with good advice and guidance, has led to students being placed on appropriate courses. This change and the improvement in teaching has brought about better progress for students overall.
- There is a very good programme of support to guide students into suitable choices when they leave school. Increasingly, students are choosing to go to university as well as into apprenticeships and other forms of training.
- There are effective systems in place to monitor the quality of teaching. These are linked to those in the main school. Teachers' specialist subject knowledge is well used to support course planning. The effective use of resources supports and enhances learning. Teachers have high expectations of what students can achieve, which are well matched to the needs and abilities of the students. All these factors contribute to students' rapid progress.
- Achievement in the sixth form is good in both academic and vocational courses. In 2014, most students completed AS, A-level and vocational courses successfully and gained the qualifications intended.
- Well-developed support structures enable students who might not otherwise have been able to achieve well to make good progress. Any students who have not gained grade C in GCSE English and mathematics on entry to the sixth form are helped to do so. Disabled students, those with special educational needs and disadvantaged students from Year 11 make similarly good progress to that of their classmates.
- Opportunities to develop personal, social and employability skills are embedded within the curriculum, which helps prepare students well for life after school.
- Behaviour in the sixth form is impressive. Students' positive attitudes to learning contribute strongly to the good progress made. Students demonstrate mature attitudes to study and they attend well.
- Students contribute well to the life of the school, taking part in a range of extra-curricular and enrichment activities, including working with pupils in the primary school.
- All students feel safe, well supported and advised. They form a cohesive body which takes pride in its achievements.

## What inspection judgements mean

School	Grade	Judgement	Description
	Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
	Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	135879
<b>Local authority</b>	Buckinghamshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	439941

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

<b>Type of school</b>	All-through
<b>School category</b>	Academy converter
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in the sixth form</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	1,095
<b>Of which, number on roll in sixth form</b>	101
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Gordon Joyner
<b>Headteacher</b>	Fiona Froment
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	16 November 2011
<b>Telephone number</b>	01296 428551
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