

Inspection of Aylesford School

Teapot Lane, Aylesford, Kent ME20 7JU

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| Inspection dates: | 29 and 30 April 2025 |
| The quality of education | Requires improvement |
| Behaviour and attitudes | Good |
| Personal development | Good |
| Leadership and management | Requires improvement |
| Sixth-form provision | Good |
| Previous inspection grade | Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005 |

The headteacher of this school is Tanya Kelvie. This school is part of Character Education Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Matthew Wright, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Sheila Smith.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils embrace countless opportunities to develop positive character traits. The school actively fosters courage, confidence and resilience, alongside other aspects of character development. Staff reward pupils' efforts, and pupils relish this positive reinforcement. The school's inclusive vision creates an environment where pupils feel happy and free to be themselves. Community events hosted by the school help pupils learn and develop further. The popular 'dementia café' is a shining example of this, where pupils demonstrate empathy and kindness at the same time as learning vital skills such as organisation and taking responsibility.

The school is calm and orderly. Pupils behave well. They are polite and courteous to each other and to visitors and staff. The school deals with bullying robustly and fairly. Although some parents raise concerns, most pupils have confidence in how the school supports them and feel that bullying is rare.

The school has high expectations for everyone. However, some pupils do not learn as well as they should because the recent improvements to the school's curriculum are not fully embedded.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

The school's published outcomes in 2024 were well below national averages. This was due to weaknesses in the legacy curriculum, the lingering impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and some turbulence in staffing. Recently, the school has taken appropriate action to strengthen the quality of education that it provides. Staffing has settled. However, some aspects of the school's improvement work are in the early stages. Currently, not all pupils learn as well as they should.

The school's curriculum has undergone significant review and refinement. It is ambitious and incorporates elements of the school's strong focus on character development. The school identifies the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities accurately and shares relevant information with teaching staff so that they can adapt the curriculum to meet pupils' needs well. Staff use their strong subject knowledge to present new content clearly, and they explain new concepts carefully, especially in the sixth form. In some subjects, pupils learn well and produce high-quality work, for example in art and photography. However, the work given to pupils in some other subjects, including some core subjects, is not as well matched to the ambitious curriculum aims. As a result, pupils do not build new knowledge and skills as effectively as they should.

In all subjects, regular checks provide valuable information to teachers and pupils about their progress through the curriculum. Sixth-form students use this information to support their own independent study. In some lessons, teachers systematically check that pupils build critical knowledge and skills. However, this is not always the case. Sometimes, teachers' checks are not precise enough. In these cases, teachers do not address pupils' misconceptions or gaps effectively or swiftly enough. In the sixth form, expert staff use their strong subject knowledge to help students remember crucial elements of the

curriculum and build powerful knowledge and vocabulary. They regularly and systematically check that students remember vital knowledge and skills.

The school has prioritised reading. The school's reading programme ensures that pupils read ambitious texts often. Pupils benefit from purposeful weekly library lessons, where expert staff help them to practise reading with fluency and comprehension. Those who need it, receive bespoke support, for example, through small-group interventions that teach pupils to read with confidence. Pupils who have fallen behind with reading are identified quickly and receive specialist support to help them catch up quickly.

The school has rightly ensured that attendance remains a high priority. As a result, attendance is consistently above the national average. Dedicated staff work closely with families to ensure that support is given when needed, especially when attendance is low. A range of specialist support helps pupils engage positively with their education, for example therapeutic support and support from educational psychologists.

The wider personal development of pupils is a strength. The school's focus on preparing pupils for life beyond school is comprehensive. The ambitious personal, social and health education (PSHE) curriculum teaches pupils vital knowledge and skills in an age-appropriate way. Trained staff deliver this in well-designed weekly lessons throughout the school, complemented by effective use of daily mentor sessions. Sixth-form students benefit from age-appropriate PSHE and a tailored approach to preparing them for life in modern Britain. Throughout the school, the curriculum is enriched by a wide and varied offer of trips, visits and wider opportunities. Assemblies further strengthen the programme. All pupils receive strong careers information and guidance, and as they progress through the school, they experience purposeful work experience opportunities.

Staff appreciate how well the school takes account of workload, for example, giving ample time to implement new policies. However, the school's approach to evaluating the impact of its own policies and practices requires sharpening. Those responsible for governance do not have a clear enough understanding of the quality of provision and the areas that require significant attention. Some elements of school improvement have been effective, for example the focus on improving the sequencing of the curriculum. However, those responsible for governance, including the trust, have only recently taken sufficient steps to understand the strengths and priorities for development. The trust recognises that the school's systematic process of self-evaluation and review requires more precision.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The improvements that the school has made to the curriculum have not been fully implemented yet. This means that in some subjects, there is variability in the

implementation of the school's ambitious curriculum, and teachers do not help pupils remember and build on crucial information as well as they should. The school should continue to support staff to implement the curriculum effectively.

- Sometimes teachers do not check what pupils know or remember effectively. As a result, gaps and misconceptions in pupils' understanding are not identified or addressed as thoroughly as they should be. The school must ensure that teachers consistently diagnose these gaps and misconceptions accurately and adjust subsequent teaching accordingly to support pupils' learning further.
- The school does not have an accurate understanding of how well its actions to improve specific aspects of its provision, including the quality of education, are working. As a result, some of the strategies the school is using are not focused specifically enough on improving the impact of the curriculum. The trust and governors need to sharpen their understanding of the strengths and areas for development in the school and ensure that they evaluate the impact of improvements more precisely.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

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| Unique reference number | 149319 |
| Local authority | Kent |
| Inspection number | 10379945 |
| Type of school | Secondary Comprehensive |
| School category | Academy special sponsor-led |
| Age range of pupils | 11 to 18 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 897 |
| Of which, number on roll in the sixth form | 45 |
| Appropriate authority | Board of trustees |
| Chair of trust | Sheila Smith |
| CEO of the trust | Matthew Wright |
| Headteacher | Tanya Kelvie |
| Website | www.aylesford.kent.sch.uk |
| Date of previous inspection | Not previously inspected |

Information about this school

- Aylesford School converted to become an academy in September 2022. When its predecessor school, of the same name, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be good for overall effectiveness.
- The school is part of Character Education Trust.
- The school currently uses two registered alternative provisions.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. During a graded inspection, we grade the school for each of our key judgements (quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and management) and for any relevant provision judgement (early years and/or sixth form provision). Schools receiving a graded inspection from September 2024 will not be given an overall effectiveness grade.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher and executive headteacher, senior leaders, staff and pupils. The lead inspector also met with representatives from the board of trustees and some governors, including the chair of governors.
- The inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, science, art, physical education and geography. They discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, teachers and pupils, visited lessons and looked at samples of pupils' work. An inspector reviewed the provision for pupils who need extra help with their reading. Inspectors also looked at the curriculum, visited lessons and looked at samples of pupils' work in some other subjects.
- Inspectors considered the responses to the Ofsted Parent View questionnaire, including the free-text comments. They also took account of the responses to the confidential staff and pupil surveys and gathered the views of both staff and pupils throughout the inspection.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors reviewed and scrutinised a range of the school's documents, including leaders' plans for improving the school, minutes of governor body meetings and records relating to pupils' attendance and behaviour.

Inspection team

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|-------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Linda Culling, lead inspector | His Majesty's Inspector |
| Eliot Hodges | Ofsted Inspector |
| Elaine Parkinson | Ofsted Inspector |
| Julia Mortimore | Ofsted Inspector |

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