

# Aylesford School

Teapot Lane, Aylesford, Kent ME20 7JU

## Inspection dates

14–15 November 2017

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a school that requires improvement

- Following the last inspection, there was a steep decline in standards due to weaknesses in leadership and governance.
- Up until now, pupils have not made enough progress from their starting points. Stronger leadership and more stable staffing means current pupils are now doing better.
- The quality of teaching is variable. Teachers do not always set pupils work pitched at the right level to enable them to make sufficiently rapid progress.
- The guidance teachers give to pupils to improve their work is not consistently effective in helping them to develop their knowledge, skills and understanding.
- Some pupils' attitudes to learning and their behaviour are not consistently good. Some lack the confidence and self-belief to be successful learners.
- The school's 'character strengths' initiative is helping pupils' personal development but it is not yet fully embedded.
- Attendance is improving, but some pupils, especially the disadvantaged and those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities, still miss too much school. This is slowing their learning and progress.
- The quality of teaching and leadership in the sixth form is good. As a result, outcomes for students in the sixth form are improving strongly.

### The school has the following strengths

- Over the past 15 months, new leaders and governors have reversed the decline and the school is now improving.
- Leaders are conscientiously tackling the areas needing attention. They have introduced a much more appropriate curriculum so pupils are better prepared for the future.
- The school's professional development programme is sharpening teachers' skills.
- Pupils feel safe and value the support they receive from staff.
- The school's partnership with Wrotham School is effective. Collaborative work between the two schools is building a solid foundation for the future.

## Full report

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

- Improve teaching, learning and assessment, to improve standards and progress, by:
  - ensuring that teachers give pupils work that is pitched at the right level, taking greater account of their starting points, to enable them to make more rapid progress
  - increasing the level of challenge so that all pupils give more depth to their written and spoken answers.
- Improve pupils' personal development and behaviour by:
  - further embedding the school's 'character strengths' so that all pupils have the highest expectations of how to behave
  - improving levels of attendance for all pupils, especially the disadvantaged and those who have SEN and/or disabilities.
- Further improve leadership and management, by:
  - ensuring that teachers follow the school's marking policy, checking that there is greater consistency in the advice and guidance teachers give to pupils to improve their work so that they strengthen their knowledge, skills and understanding.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

**Good**

- Since the last inspection, standards of learning and behaviour declined rapidly due to weaknesses in leadership and governance by those presiding at the time. A review commissioned by the local authority in May 2016 found that standards were unacceptably low. As a result, new leadership has been put in place which has successfully halted the decline and put the school on a much more stable footing.
- Over the past 15 months, the headteacher and executive headteacher, supported by other senior leaders, have given the school much-needed direction. They have high expectations and are ambitious for the future of the school. They have swiftly put actions into place which are bearing fruit. While there is still more to be done, the impact of their work so far bodes well for the future.
- The local authority has brokered a formal partnership between Aylesford School and Wrotham School. Some staff are shared between the two institutions. This arrangement is providing mutual support and challenge and helping to speed up the pace of improvement.
- Senior and middle leaders are playing a key part in driving improvement forward. Many are new to the school or relatively inexperienced in their role. They value the training they have received using the 'leaders' palette', a set of useful leadership tools, which is enabling them to become more confident leaders. They told inspectors they appreciate the collaborative work they are doing with their counterparts at Wrotham School which is helping to sharpen their professional skills still further.
- In recent times, the school has suffered from turbulence in staffing which led to many pupils experiencing poor-quality teaching. This legacy is still being felt by pupils across the school and many have a lot of ground to make up. Leaders have worked hard to recruit high-quality permanent staff which is having a much more positive effect on pupils' learning and progress.
- Parents who responded to the questionnaire recognise and appreciate the stronger leadership and more stable staffing. One parent said: 'I feel this school is working really hard with the parents and children to get the school back on its feet after the upheaval of the last couple of years.'
- Leaders and governors know the school well and have an accurate view of its strengths and weaknesses. The school development plan is focusing on the right things to make the school a better place in which to learn. Leaders have implemented more-robust systems for checking whether their plans are working.
- Leaders have made it clear that they will not tolerate underperformance from staff. They have successfully tackled weak teaching and have challenging expectations of teachers' performance. Teachers are held to account more stringently than in the past. Governors keep a close eye on the performance-management process and make sure it is monitored effectively.
- School leaders are using pupil premium money and the Year 7 literacy and numeracy catch-up funding more thoughtfully to provide a wide range of support for these groups. Additional support is well planned. For example, all disadvantaged pupils

benefit from the extra help in English and mathematics they access during mentor time. As a result, disadvantaged pupils are now making more progress towards catching up with their peers.

- Funding for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is being increasingly well used due to new leadership in this area of the school's work. Money is being spent wisely on improving the quality of teaching in the classroom as well as on specific additional support. Inspectors saw examples of learning support assistants working very positively in class with pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. Consequently, this group of pupils is starting to make better headway with their learning.
- The new leaders quickly recognised that the curriculum was not fit for purpose. As a result, they have made several changes to ensure that pupils have the opportunity to study a greater range of subjects. For example, dance and drama is now taught to pupils in key stage 3. In the past, many pupils only studied one science GCSE, and this has been adjusted. Consequently, the curriculum now provides more challenge and is helping to raise pupils' aspirations.
- Pupils approaching key stage 4 receive individual help with their option choices from senior staff and the careers adviser to ensure that the pathway they choose is right for them. The school makes provision off-site for a small number for pupils for whom an alternative curriculum is better suited to their needs.
- Pupils' wider skills are developed through a comprehensive range of trips and visits as well as extra-curricular activities in areas such as sport, the arts and subject-specific clubs. Responses from the pupil questionnaire suggest that participation rates are not yet as high as school leaders would wish.
- The school has recently reviewed how it provides for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Input during mentor time, assemblies and drop-down days helps pupils to reflect on current issues such as online bullying and how to stay safe. Visits from outside speakers such as the fire service provide pupils with positive role models and help to raise their aspirations of what they can do and achieve.
- Currently, pupils are not confident in how to protect themselves from the threat of extremist views. Leaders know this and have plans in place to address the issue.
- Leaders recognise that the school is on a journey to make up a great deal of lost ground. They have introduced many changes in a short space of time and realise that the full impact will not be felt until they have had time to fully work through.

## **Governance of the school**

- Governance is effective.
- A completely new governing body has been put in place in the last six months. Some governors already have experience of working on the governing body of Wrotham School. The two governing bodies are now working increasingly closely together, each valuing the support and challenge of the other.
- Governors have a wide range of useful skills from business and educational contexts. They have a secure understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and are committed to bringing about sustained improvement. Increasingly, they spend time in school, visiting classes with senior leaders and holding them more stringently

to account.

- Governors have a solid understanding of their roles and responsibilities. They evaluate their work effectively and have an action plan in place to chart their future direction. They undertake regular training relating to areas such as radicalisation and they oversee the school's work in keeping pupils safe.
- Governors support school leaders in holding teachers to account and are involved, as appropriate, in decisions regarding pay progression.

## Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Safeguarding has high importance in the school. All statutory responsibilities are fulfilled and record keeping is robust and thorough. Staff are trained regularly on safeguarding matters such as preventing radicalisation.
- School staff with responsibilities for safeguarding take their roles very seriously and their details are advertised all over the building so everyone knows who to go to if there is a safeguarding concern. Leaders work closely with outside agencies, ensuring that referrals are swift and families get the help they need as quickly as possible.
- Pupils understand how to keep themselves safe from threats such as online bullying or trolling. Inspectors saw pupils receiving guidance on these issues during mentor time. Pupils told inspectors they feel safe in school. They said bullying is not common and they know who to go to if they need help.

## Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

## Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching and learning is variable and inconsistent both within and across subjects. Since the last inspection, the quality of teaching has not been of sufficiently high quality to ensure that all pupils make the progress they should.
- Teaching is improving under the new leadership but there is still work to be done before it is securely good. Some teachers do not set work which is pitched at the right level. Tasks are sometimes too easy and at other times too difficult, and the same work is often given to every pupil regardless of their starting points. Consequently, some pupils are not maximising their potential.
- Many pupils, especially boys, lack the confidence to tackle the work they are given, which inhibits their progress. Some are reluctant, despite help, to have a go. When they do, work is often disorganised and untidy. The school's work to encourage character traits to combat this, such as resilience and curiosity, is beginning to work but is yet to have full impact.
- When work is not engaging, some pupils lose focus and drift off-task. On occasion, they resort to low-level disruption such as chatting to their neighbour or behaving inappropriately. Some teachers do not always address this robustly enough.
- A scrutiny of pupils' work in their books showed that there is variability in the quality of advice that teachers give to pupils to improve their work. In the best examples seen, the guidance, in line with the school's marking policy, helps to develop pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding and move them onto a higher level. Where pupils

had responded to this advice, they made faster progress. However, the inconsistency of approach is currently limiting the progress some pupils make.

- Some teachers are not routinely using assessment information consistently well to track pupils' progress. The recently introduced assessment system appears to be causing some confusion and is yet to embed fully.
- In class, many teachers use questioning well to test pupils' understanding. However, on occasion, questioning is not used skilfully enough and this leads to superficial answers from pupils. They do not think deeply about their ideas and new concepts. As a result, pupils do not routinely give depth or detail to their written or spoken answers.
- Where teaching is more effective, learning is well planned and teachers use their strong subject knowledge to set work that challenges pupils and makes them think hard. They have high expectations of what pupils can do and achieve and pupils respond well, leading to high levels of engagement and faster progress.
- There were several examples seen, such as in dance, drama and history, where pupils worked well together sharing ideas and assessing one another's work. Pupils listened attentively and showed respect for their peers' differing viewpoints.
- Many pupils enter the school with low literacy levels. All pupils are encouraged to read widely and often and they chart their progress through the accelerated-reader programme. Some pupils in key stage 3 make regular visits to the local British Legion establishment where staff hear them read. Such activities are helping to develop pupils' literacy and communication skills further.
- Parents receive regular information about their children's progress. Some parents who responded to the questionnaire said they found this information useful while a small number said they would like it to be a little clearer.
- Teaching is improving and pupils say that, increasingly, classrooms are calmer and they are learning more.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

## Requires improvement

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement.
- The school's recently introduced 'character strengths' programme is encouraging pupils' personal development of wider attributes such as curiosity, resilience and open-mindedness. While this is working to some degree, a significant number of pupils are not yet confident and self-assured learners or developing these attributes effectively.
- Although improving, the number of pupils who miss school through absence is too high, particularly disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities. The number of pupils who are persistently absent has remained stubbornly high for the last two years. This inhibits their personal development.
- Attendance is a high priority and pupils are encouraged to take responsibility for coming to school by completing their individual attendance trackers. The attendance officer takes swift action to follow up absences; home visits to vulnerable families are

proving effective. As a result, attendance has improved on the same period last year, though there remains more to do to reach the national average.

- 'The bridge' on-site facility provides a safe haven for those pupils who are finding school difficult. Vulnerable pupils and those who are struggling to manage their behaviour are well supported there and helped to make the transition back to mainstream classes when they are ready.
- Pupils are taught about treating each other with respect and valuing each other's differences. They understand that using derogatory language is unacceptable and, in the main, they demonstrate tolerant and accepting attitudes.
- Pupils told inspectors they feel safe and looked after in school. They very much value the support of the staff in pupil services and have confidence that they will help them with any difficulty they have.
- Pupils are confident about how to keep themselves safe. During the inspection, they learned about e-safety such as keeping privacy settings up to date on social media and not revealing personal details.
- A small number of pupils attend off-site provision. Communication between school and the alternative settings regarding these pupils' attendance is not always regular enough.

## Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement. A third of those parents who responded to the questionnaire agree that some pupils do not behave well.
- Leaders have recently implemented a new behaviour management strategy, focusing on developing pupils' positive behaviour characteristics and emphasising rewards rather than sanctions. Some pupils are finding it hard to adjust to the new system and some pupils feel that it lacks clarity.
- Pupils reported that they now feel more positive about behaviour and that it has improved over the past year. Nonetheless, low-level disruption is still a feature of some lessons and this slows learning down.
- Positively, exclusions are falling. Leaders are also finding alternatives to external exclusion so that pupils are still sanctioned but do not miss out on so much learning time.
- Around the school site, pupils are generally orderly and calm. They are friendly and polite to visitors, smartly dressed and, in the main, arrive to school and lessons punctually. During break and lunchtimes they socialise together well and keep the site free from litter.

### Outcomes for pupils

### Requires improvement

- Pupils do not make consistently strong progress across all subjects and year groups.
- A high proportion of pupils enter the school with attainment that is significantly below that found nationally. Since the last inspection, examination results for Year 11 pupils show they made much less progress than they should from their starting points.

Disadvantaged pupils and the most able made significantly less progress.

- Poor teaching in the past, turbulence in staffing, and low attendance levels have been detrimental to pupils' learning and progress over time. In addition, Year 11 pupils who took GCSE examinations in 2017 were not following an appropriate curriculum. This had a negative effect on their outcomes.
- Since the arrival of new leadership, better teaching is having a positive impact on the progress pupils make. Last summer, a number of subjects showed improved performance for Year 11 pupils from the previous year. In addition, of the pupils in Year 10 who sat their GCSE English language examination a year early, nearly three-quarters achieved a standard pass, and disadvantaged pupils did just as well as their peers.
- Current pupils across the school are benefiting from higher-quality, more-stable staffing. While many of them still have plenty of ground to make up, the school's assessment information, together with work in pupils' books, shows that their progress is starting to speed up.
- Disadvantaged pupils, whose progress has been particularly weak in the past, are now making better progress, though some still have a good way to go to catch up with their peers. Teachers are focusing on them more sharply in lessons and have higher expectations of what they can do and achieve. Additional support such as catch-up sessions after school, during mentor time, and in the school holidays, is beginning to work.
- Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities are being more closely monitored, and well-targeted support is helping them to make more solid progress. New leadership overseeing this area of the school's work is having a positive effect on their outcomes.
- The school monitors and tracks pupils' progress on a regular basis. Work completed by pupils in key stage 4 is moderated against that of pupils at Wrotham School so leaders are confident their judgements are accurate. Analysis of tracking information at key stage 4 is robust, and subject leaders are held to account for the progress of individual pupils in their departments. Where pupils are falling behind, actions are being put in place swiftly to help them catch up.
- Progress information at key stage 3 is less effective. It does not give the school an accurate enough view of the gains pupils have made in the short term and focuses too much on the long-term picture.
- A small number of pupils attend off-site provision. School staff receive termly reports on their learning in the alternative settings. On the whole, these pupils are making the progress expected of them.
- Careers education and guidance is a developing strength. Pupils receive specialist input from Year 7 onwards, including visits from external speakers such as from the Department of Work and Pensions. All Year 10 pupils undertake a week's work experience. Such activities prepare pupils well for the next stage in their education, training or employment.

## 16 to 19 study programmes

**Good**



- In the past, students' outcomes were poor because of weak teaching further down the school, poor attendance, an inappropriate curriculum for some students and a lack of focused leadership.
- This decline has now been reversed and the sixth form is now on a much firmer footing. New leadership has brought fresh energy and a sharper, more strategic approach to this area of the school's work.
- The curriculum has been reviewed to provide a more appropriate range of courses. A levels are no longer offered and instead, school leaders have decided to focus on vocational options and the recently introduced International Baccalaureate Careers-Related Programme (IBCP) to better meet students' needs and aspirations.
- Leaders make a concerted effort to ensure that students leaving Year 11 are on the right courses, whether joining the school's sixth form or going to suitable destinations elsewhere. Careers education, guidance and support helps students to make the right decision.
- The school's full-time careers adviser is knowledgeable and approachable and is on hand to offer students individual advice. Students in Year 13 benefit from additional help from a dedicated member of staff who supports them with their applications to university or into further training or employment. As a result, no students left Year 13 last year without an appropriate destination, and 50% went on to university study.
- The small sixth form enables staff to know all students well and to cater for their individual needs. Pastoral support is therefore strong, and study plans are tailored to suit each student and monitored rigorously and regularly.
- As a result of more-focused support and a more appropriate curriculum, students' attendance has increased over the past year. Students are enthusiastic about life in the sixth form, as evidenced by a number of them coming back to Aylesford having tried a sixth-form experience elsewhere.
- Teaching in the sixth form is generally stronger than in the rest of the school. There are positive relationships, and teachers are knowledgeable about their subject areas. They plan engaging lessons and set challenging work which deepens students' knowledge, skills and understanding.
- Consequently, the progress that students make is good and improving. In 2017 students' outcomes for vocational courses were better than the year before and current students' progress is on an upward trajectory.
- In the past, outcomes for students who retook English and mathematics GCSE were weak, but better teaching is now improving progress for students taking these subjects.
- Enrichment and leadership opportunities for students to develop their wider skills is limited at present but developing. All students in Year 12 undertake work experience which prepares them well for life beyond the sixth form.

## School details

Unique reference number	118882
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10041463

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	803
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	57
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Derek Cuff
Headteacher	Tanya Kelvie
Telephone number	01622 717 341
Website	<a href="http://www.aylesford.kent.sch.uk/">www.aylesford.kent.sch.uk/</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:tanya.kelvie@aylesford.kent.sch.uk">tanya.kelvie@aylesford.kent.sch.uk</a>
Date of previous inspection	13–14 January 2014

## Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- Aylesford School is a smaller-than-average secondary school. It is a non-selective school in a local authority where high numbers of schools select pupils by ability.
- The previous headteacher left in the autumn of 2016. The current headteacher joined the school initially on a part-time basis in September 2016 and became interim headteacher in January 2017. She was appointed to the permanent position in September 2017.
- An executive headteacher joined the school initially on a part-time basis in September

2016 as part of the formal partnership between Aylesford School and Wrotham School.

- The local authority is currently supporting the formal partnership between Aylesford School and Wrotham School. An academy order has been issued for the Divergent Partnership Trust to sponsor Aylesford School, and the academisation process is currently underway.
- The school has restructured the senior leadership team and made many new staff appointments at middle-leader level. A high number of staff have left the school since the last inspection.
- The school currently uses two alternative providers, Cedars, and West Kent Health Needs, to provide alternative education for a small number of pupils in both key stages 3 and 4.
- The vast majority of pupils are of White British heritage.
- About a quarter of pupils in the school are eligible for support from the pupil premium, which is in line with the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is well below the national average.
- In 2016, the school did not meet the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress from key stage 2 to key stage 4.
- The school meets the Department for Education's definition of a coasting school based on key stage 4 academic performance results in 2014, 2015 and 2016.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in 50 lessons, eight of them visited jointly with senior leaders. They also visited an assembly and several mentor sessions.
- During visits to lessons, inspectors looked at pupils' work in books. Inspectors also examined a selection of pupils' books in key stages 3 and 4, with school leaders, to get a broader picture of progress over time.
- Inspectors held regular meetings with senior leaders and with a range of staff, including newly qualified teachers and staff new to the school. Inspectors also spoke informally to many staff. An inspector spoke to staff by telephone at two alternative settings.
- The lead inspector met with three members of the governing body, including the chair. A separate meeting was held with a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of the 47 responses from parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire (Parent View) as well as 46 comments. Two parents also sent comments directly to Ofsted. Inspectors analysed the 16 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for staff and the 214 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for pupils.
- Inspectors reviewed a wide range of school information. This included the school website, evaluation of its performance, plans for improvement, information about standards and progress, logs about behaviour and attendance, as well as a range of policies.

## Inspection team

Paula Sargent, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Susan Willman	Ofsted Inspector
Pat Slonecki	Ofsted Inspector
Mark Roessler	Ofsted Inspector

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