

# Astor College (A Specialist College for the Arts)

Astor Avenue, Dover, Kent CT17 0AS

## Inspection dates

19–20 September 2017

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
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	Requires improvement

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a school that requires improvement

- The quality of teaching and learning is too variable. Teachers do not routinely use information about what pupils already know to plan learning tasks that will challenge and support them to make good progress.
- The training and support provided for teachers has not consistently improved the quality of teaching.
- Typically, pupils, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, do not make strong enough progress.
- Teachers do not routinely challenge the most able pupils to make good progress.
- Leaders and governors have not ensured that the additional pupil premium funding is used effectively.
- Some teachers' expectations for what pupils can achieve are too low.
- Attainment at GCSE is below national averages in a range of subjects, including mathematics and science.
- Leaders' improvements to systems and structures have not been fully established into effective practice. They have not yet improved the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes.
- The role of middle leaders in improving teaching and pupils' progress is not fully developed.
- Levels of attendance remain below national averages overall and for all groups of pupils.

### The school has the following strengths

- There is some good teaching and learning, for example in English and the arts subjects.
- Pupils receive a strong level of care, guidance and support. Pupils feel safe and are happy. The vast majority behave well in school.
- Leaders demonstrate a clear understanding of what is required to improve the standard of education for all pupils.
- The sixth form is led well. Students mature into thoughtful young adults. They achieve better than younger pupils because of more consistently strong teaching.

## Full report

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

- Improve outcomes for all groups of pupils in key stages 3 and 4.
- Improve the quality of teaching, by:
  - raising teachers' expectations of what pupils should achieve
  - making sure that teachers recognise and identify pupils' prior knowledge and understanding so that they plan learning tasks that build on pupils' previous learning
  - making sure questioning in lessons is sufficiently demanding for pupils of all ability groups
  - checking that work routinely challenges pupils' thinking and extends their learning, particularly for the most able
  - ensuring that meaningful homework is set for all subjects and key stages in line with the school's policy
  - ensuring that teachers' professional development and training informs their practice.
- Improve leadership at all levels, by:
  - ensuring that changes to systems and structures are fully implemented to secure consistency of practice by all staff
  - providing further training for middle leaders so that they contribute effectively to raising levels of achievement in their areas of responsibility
  - making sure that each leader is accountable for raising standards of achievement by setting clear, measurable targets
  - increasing the effectiveness of leaders' monitoring of pupils' progress against their targets
  - using the pupil premium funding more effectively to bring about improvements in the progress and achievement of disadvantaged pupils.
- Improve the attendance of all groups of pupils.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

### Requires improvement

- Many of the priorities and actions put in place by current senior leaders to address the challenges faced by the school have not yet had a sufficiently positive and consistent impact on teaching and learning. Inconsistencies in teaching and learning remain across key stages 3 and 4.
- Leadership in the school has experienced a period of significant change since the last inspection. Several middle leaders in key positions have only recently joined the school. Despite early signs of improvement, the impact of development plans has been limited.
- Leaders have not made effective use of additional government funding to support disadvantaged pupils. The priorities and related actions listed in the pupil premium strategy plan have not brought about the intended improvements. As a consequence, the progress and achievement of these pupils remains significantly below average compared with other pupils nationally with similar starting points.
- A high priority has been placed on improving teaching. Much continuous professional development, including induction for newly appointed staff and workshops for teachers, is effective in improving teachers' skills. The school is part of a local teaching network which provides opportunities to share effective practice in improving teaching and learning. Leaders typically identify what requires attention and provide teachers with regular training and support to improve teaching. However, this training and support has not yet led to consistently strong teaching in all subjects.
- Leaders make effective use of additional funding for Year 7 literacy catch-up as well as for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. For example, the literacy catch-up funding successfully helped pupils involved in this programme last year to increase their reading ages. However, reading is not promoted strongly enough throughout the school to ensure that pupils develop good literacy skills. The school's library lacks a sufficient variety and volume of reading materials, and pupils commented that it was a place that did not appeal to them.
- Leaders have ensured that the curriculum provides broad and balanced opportunities to meet effectively learners' needs and interests. Pupils told inspectors that they appreciate the range of subjects, including those linked to the school's status as an art college, for example fine art, drama and dance. These contribute well to pupils' moral, social and cultural development.
- Pupils are prepared well for life in modern Britain through the delivery of an effective personal, social and health education programme. Fundamental British values are promoted successfully in assemblies, citizenship lessons and in other subjects, for example in history and in English.
- Effective careers education is provided across all years, with additional work experience in Year 11. Pupils' experiences are supported well by the school's 'Period 6' programme, which offers a good range of extra-curricular enrichment activities, such as sports and art clubs, and subject-focused interventions, including mathematics and science.

- Staff morale is very positive. Staff say that they are proud to work at the school and are well motivated. Leaders promote a culture of high expectations, with everyone treated as an individual. Consequently, all staff feel valued and contribute effectively to life in the school.

## **Governance of the school**

- The board of directors is dedicated to improving standards and it provides strong support to school leaders. Directors demonstrate a good understanding of the context, challenges and priorities for the school.
- The federation's chief executive officer is based in the school. He sets clear targets for improvement for the principal and is on hand to provide support as required.
- Directors hold leaders to account for the performance of the school. They regularly review performance and progress information provided by the principal and other leaders. They challenge leaders on areas such as finance, health and safety, recruitment of staff, and outcomes. However, directors' monitoring and understanding of the progress of disadvantaged pupils requires improvement.
- Directors have undertaken a range of suitable training in order to fulfil their statutory duties, for example in ensuring safer recruitment processes are followed closely. They make a positive contribution to the school.

## **Safeguarding**

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Procedures and policies meet statutory requirements and records are detailed and of a high quality. The school's safeguarding lead is supported well by senior staff and the directors of year.
- Leaders and governors receive relevant training to ensure that checks on the suitability of staff are robust. Training of staff and governors is both comprehensive and regular. Leaders make sure that any adults who join the school during the school year receive appropriate training regarding safeguarding and child protection practices. As a result, all adults know the signs to look out for to identify if a child may be at risk.
- Leaders work effectively with families and outside agencies, such as the local authority, social services and the police, to support vulnerable pupils.
- Pupils say that they feel safe and well cared for. Instances of bullying are rare and, when they do occur, staff deal with them quickly and effectively.

## **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

## **Requires improvement**

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is too variable across key stages 3 and 4. Improvements in teaching are not sufficiently widespread across subjects and key stages to generate effective learning and progress for all.
- In some areas, including mathematics and science, teachers' planning does not

routinely take into account what pupils already know.

- Despite a whole-school focus on raising aspirations, sometimes teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are too low. Consequently, pupils are not routinely challenged to move on to harder work or extend their thinking about topics. This is especially the case for the most able pupils.
- The effectiveness of questions given to pupils varies too much between subjects and lessons. In less effective activities, teachers set questions that do not require pupils to develop their thinking and understanding. These activities do not support pupils' progress.
- Leaders have established an additional teaching group in each of Years 7 to 10 to provide extra challenge across the whole curriculum for the most able pupils. These pupils are keen to do well, but teaching does not consistently enable them to achieve at the highest standards. Pupils are not routinely challenged well enough by the use of more demanding questioning or work that stretches their knowledge and skills.
- The setting and quality of homework is effective in some subjects, but is not matched consistently enough by other subjects and across key stages.
- Teachers follow the school's assessment policy, providing feedback to pupils on their progress, and giving guidance on how to improve their work. Pupils told inspectors that they appreciate the time that is given to them to redraft and improve work. They said that it makes a difference and allows them to learn from their mistakes and make progress.
- Where the most effective teaching takes place, for example in English and the arts, lessons are planned well, with activities that appropriately challenge the pupils. These activities are based on assessment that illustrates effectively what the pupils can already do and need to do next.
- Typically, pupils' work in books is well presented. Most pupils know their targets and can explain what they need to do to improve.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

**Requires improvement**

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils know who to contact if they have any concerns while in school. They are confident that they will receive appropriate support should they need it.
- Relationships between staff and pupils are strong. Pupils speak extremely positively about the support they receive, such as for emotional well-being and counselling. For example, in response to the needs of some pupils, leaders have recently introduced mental health support.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is well catered for. Assemblies, tutor time, and lessons all contribute effectively to this. For example, in assemblies pupils learn about e-safety and healthy lifestyles.
- Citizenship and personal, social and health education lessons help prepare pupils well

for life in modern Britain. They learn about democracy, tolerance and respect. Pupils reported that incidents of prejudiced behaviour, such as homophobic and racist language, are very rare. Pupils also benefit from careers education, learning about healthy lifestyles and being citizens in a multicultural, local and wider community.

- Pupils are offered a wide range of extra-curricular activities, for example dance and sport, which enrich their experiences. One pupil said: 'There is so much choice, I really enjoy taking part.'
- International links are a strong feature in school life. Several students from abroad undertake a one-year study placement in the school's sixth form. In addition, leaders have established links with the USA, Bulgaria, France and Portugal, where pupils go on educational visits. Pupils value the opportunity to experience life abroad and to further develop their understanding of the wider world.
- Leaders make regular visits to the alternative provision centre to make sure that pupils who attend are kept safe and make good progress. The school receives regular attendance and assessment information for each of the pupils.
- The school has historically had an above-average level of pupils joining after the usual starting points. Pupils who join during the academic year are integrated successfully into the school. Those whose first language is not English receive strong language development support from the English as an additional language coordinator.

## **Behaviour**

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement because high levels of absence impact negatively on pupils' progress.
- Attendance, particularly that of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, has been below national averages in recent years. This has presented a considerable challenge for leaders in their efforts to improve attendance of these groups, and attendance overall. Action to improve attendance has yet to ensure that these groups of pupils miss less of their learning.
- Pupils are polite to each other and the staff. Uniforms are usually worn tidily. During break and lunchtimes, pupils interact well in the dining area or in the external areas of the school. They respect the environment: there is no graffiti, and litter is seen rarely.
- Typically, pupils arrive punctually to lessons, appropriately equipped. The majority show positive attitudes to learning. Pupils behave well, and disruption in lessons is rare. If it does occur, teachers deal with it effectively.
- Exclusion rates for all groups of pupils have shown indications of reducing in the current year, which is an improvement over recent years. This is a result of higher expectations, and the use of an increasingly effective behaviour 'monitoring and rewards' system. Pupils like this system, and value the rewards.

## Outcomes for pupils

## Requires improvement

- The progress of pupils in key stages 3 and 4 requires further improvement. In 2016, the overall progress in the GCSE examinations improved from the previous year. However, it was still lower than that of pupils nationally. The progress of disadvantaged pupils remained much lower than that of other pupils nationally.
- Lesson observations and scrutiny of pupils' work indicates that current pupils' progress is not improving consistently across subjects. For example, progress in mathematics and science remains low overall for all groups of pupils. However, pupils' books show that current pupils are now making better progress in English and the arts subjects.
- Work in pupils' books indicates that across a range of subjects the progress of current disadvantaged pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, is variable. In many subjects it is not strong enough and the attainment of these pupils remains below that of other pupils nationally with similar starting points.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported well, although their progress is variable across the curriculum.
- Provisional GCSE results for 2017 indicate that pupils' attainment in English, mathematics and science is below national averages.
- Very few pupils enter the school with higher levels of achievement in key stage 2. Leaders' work to raise achievement for the most able pupils has had mixed success. Many do not achieve the higher outcomes they should because they are not being challenged and extended sufficiently in lessons to achieve high rates of progress.
- Both entry and achievement in the English Baccalaureate are below national averages.
- Improvements in the provision of careers advice and guidance has resulted in the proportion of pupils moving into education, employment or training at the end of Year 11 moving closer to the national average.
- Most pupils start school with lower attainment than pupils nationally. Year 7 catch-up funding helps pupils to make accelerated progress, for example in improving their reading through successful literacy support. Their reading has become increasingly fluent, and their comprehension abilities have improved.

## 16 to 19 study programmes

## Good

- The sixth form is well led and managed and provides well for its students. Leaders have made sure that the requirements of the 16 to 19 study programme are met. Consequently, all students study a suitable range of qualifications appropriate to their needs, including academic and vocational courses alongside employment and enterprise education.
- Leaders have established high expectations and students share their teachers' aspirations. Students value their lessons and time in sixth form. They work hard and engage well with the range of opportunities provided. Their attendance has improved in recent years and is now good. As a consequence, student attainment at the end of their courses has risen steadily.

- Teachers know students well and provide high-quality pastoral support to meet their needs. Students told inspectors that they value the support, challenge and encouragement from staff as well as the flexibility of course choice offered to them. Student pathways are carefully planned and these support students to be successful. The retention rate of students continuing to study from Year 12 to Year 13 is high.
- Teaching is typically good, and in places better, for example in fine art. Teaching, learning and assessment support and challenge students in developing their knowledge and skills. Those who fall behind are provided with additional support to improve. Achievement is good as a result. Leaders monitor closely students' performance and the quality of teaching. Leaders have provided good support in areas where teaching and learning are not consistently strong enough, for example history and graphics.
- Students are well prepared for their next steps, whether this be higher education, training, apprenticeship or employment. They are equipped for life beyond school by the provision of high-quality pastoral support and a comprehensive careers education and guidance programme. Leaders provide opportunities for visits to universities and arrange visits from a wide range of external speakers. Students who look to gain apprenticeships benefit from established links with such organisations as Kent County Council.
- Students who did not achieve at least a grade C in GCSE English and mathematics at the end of Year 11 are provided with the teaching and support needed to improve their knowledge and understanding in these subjects. However, a proportion of students who retake either or both GCSE qualifications to improve their grades are not always successful in doing so.



## School details

Unique reference number	138167
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10036946

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

Type of school	Academy converter
School category	Academy sponsor-led
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	899
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	160
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Mr J Peall
Principal	Mr L Kane
Telephone number	01304 201151
Website	<a href="http://www.astor-college.co.uk">www.astor-college.co.uk</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:admin@astor.dfamat.com">admin@astor.dfamat.com</a>
Date of previous inspection	1–2 July 2015

## Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school complies with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish.
- Astor College is an average-sized, mixed, non-selective specialist college for the arts academy within the Dover Federation for the Arts. The federation currently has five schools: Astor College and four other schools.

- At its last inspection, in 2015, Astor College was judged to require improvement.
- The current principal was appointed in January 2016.
- In 2016, the college met the government's current floor standard, which sets minimum expectations for attainment and progress.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils for whom the school receives the pupil premium is well above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is above the national average.
- Prior attainment of pupils on entry to the school for all year groups is significantly below the national average.
- The school experiences a higher than national average in pupil mobility.
- The school uses an offsite pupil referral unit: Enterprise Learning Alliance, Thanet and Dover. There are currently nine pupils attending the unit full time.
- The majority of students are White British.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 35 lessons, including joint observations with senior leaders. Inspectors looked at a range of pupils' books and listened to pupils read.
- Inspectors met with groups of pupils and students in the sixth form. They also met pupils informally during breaks and lunchtimes.
- Discussions were held with staff, including senior and middle leaders, teachers and support staff, and governors. Inspectors took account of 16 responses by parents to the online questionnaire (Parent View), and 14 written comments. Inspectors also considered 112 responses to the pupil survey and 29 responses to the staff survey.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documents. These included the school's self-evaluation document, the school improvement plan, information about performance management, pupils' achievement, behaviour and attendance records, and a range of policies and minutes of governors' meetings.

## Inspection team

David Powell, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Jennifer Bray	Ofsted Inspector
Karon Buck	Ofsted Inspector
Eliot Hodges	Ofsted Inspector

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