

# Inspection of Astor College (A Specialist College for the Arts)

Astor Avenue, Dover, Kent CT17 0AS

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Inspection dates: 28–29 January 2020

## **Overall effectiveness**

## **Requires improvement**

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The quality of education

**Requires improvement**

Behaviour and attitudes

**Good**

Personal development

**Good**

Leadership and management

**Good**

Sixth-form provision

**Good**

Previous inspection grade

Requires improvement

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

Pupils at Astor College are very welcoming, friendly and lively. They are proud of their school and enjoy the wide choice of arts subjects that it offers them.

Leaders are ambitious for pupils. However, the quality of education does not always live up to this aim. Historically, pupils have had gaps in their knowledge in some subjects and, as a result, did less well in examinations.

More pupils join Astor later in their school career than is usually the case. Many of these pupils have missed parts of their education. Despite the efforts of leaders and teachers, some of these pupils do not catch up by the end of Year 11.

Leaders make sure that pupils behave well. Relationships are strong between staff and pupils. As one Year 9 girl said: 'Teachers can be strict, but only if you cross the line.'

Staff deal well with any bullying if it happens. Pupils feel safe and very well cared for. Parents rightly value this, especially when they have moved their child to Astor from another school. One parent summed up the view of many others, saying that the staff 'have gone out of their way to support my son'.

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

Leaders have planned thoughtfully what pupils will learn. There is a wide choice of suitable and demanding subjects. Only a small number of pupils studied modern foreign languages in the past. More are now taking French. Many pupils choose English Baccalaureate subjects. These provide pupils with an ambitious curriculum.

Leaders structure their curriculum well. Subject leaders organise topics logically to build on earlier learning. For example, in French, pupils study past and future tenses in Years 7 and 8 so they can write more complex paragraphs in Year 9. In art, pupils start to use clay in Year 8 so that they can study ceramics in Year 10. Pupils learn core skills within each subject in key stage 3. These give a solid foundation for more advanced work at key stage 4. Specially trained staff work well with pupils who have low reading ages.

Some pupils have gaps in their knowledge, because of moving schools or because of poorer teaching at Astor in the past. They have not learned knowledge in the detail they need to understand more-complex topics. For example, in an experiment in science, pupils did not know the properties of the metals they were looking at. As a result, some could not explain the scientific reaction and became confused.

Leaders make sure that behaviour policies are applied consistently. As a result, pupils respond well and behaviour is good in lessons and around the school. Better training for teachers helps them to adapt their teaching to meet the different needs of pupils. Leaders have brought in precise strategies to overcome barriers to

learning for disadvantaged pupils. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) have detailed individual learning plans. When teachers use these strategies or refer to individual plans effectively, pupils learn well. However, not all teachers apply the strategies consistently. As a result, disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND do less well in some subjects.

Pupils are very respectful of the viewpoints of others. The school's 'Learning for Life' programme has been well thought out. It promotes tolerance and gives pupils insight into life in modern Britain. The school's student ambassadors are impressive role models and are highly regarded by younger pupils. Careers education is thorough and imaginative. Subject teachers link the content of their lessons with the wider world. For example, in science, pupils look at careers in medicine. In languages, pupils consider all the places in the world where French is spoken.

Academy board members understand their local area very well. They ensure that the school works well with its disadvantaged communities. Relationships are strong between parents and the school. As a result, pupils' attendance is rising and is now much closer to national averages.

The chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust provides valuable expertise. Working with the principal, he has helped sharpen the school's self-evaluation. He recognises that there is more work to do to assess which improvement strategies have had the greatest impact.

Sixth-form students are, rightly, extremely positive about the education they receive. Teachers have expert subject knowledge. Students are challenged and motivated by their study programmes. Sixth-form students with SEND are well supported. Students do well when they need to retake their GCSEs in English and mathematics. Sixth-form students receive strong careers guidance. They are well prepared for their next steps.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There is a large and well-trained safeguarding team who know their community well. Staff work closely with parents and outside agencies to protect and support their young people. The trust ensures that all employment checks are properly carried out. Staff at all levels carry out their safeguarding responsibilities well. Leaders and the academy board supervise arrangements diligently.

Pupils feel safe. The school gives them sound advice and guidance on potential risks. There are many appropriate courses for pupils, such as mental health first aid. As a result, pupils are confident and happy.

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

### (Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Since the last inspection, leaders and the academy board have successfully revised the curriculum and how it is delivered. This has led to improvements, but some pupils still have gaps in their knowledge. This is especially true for those who arrive part-way through their secondary education. Leaders should redouble their efforts to close those gaps.
- Disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND have not made enough progress in the past. Leaders have introduced sound strategies to help these pupils gain knowledge more securely. However, a small number of teachers do not apply the strategies well enough. Leaders need to ensure that teachers employ these strategies fully across all subjects so that disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND learn and remember more.
- The school's development plan identifies the right issues and is bearing fruit. Leaders and the trust recognise that they need to evaluate some aspects more precisely so that they know exactly what impact actions are having. Leaders should focus their efforts on the strategies which have the greatest impact on pupils' progress through the planned curriculum.

## 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 Ofsted Parent View information 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.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

## Further information

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

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	138167
<b>Local authority</b>	Kent
<b>Inspection number</b>	10111416
<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary comprehensive
<b>School category</b>	Academy converter
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11 to 18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	837
<b>Of which, number on roll in the sixth form</b>	124
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	Board of trustees
<b>Chair of trust</b>	Mr B Williams
<b>Principal</b>	Lee Kane
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.astor-college.co.uk">http://www.astor-college.co.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	13 November 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

## Information about this school

- A small number of pupils attend the Enterprise Learning Alliance, which gives behavioural and emotional support.
- Over half of the pupils in the school come from disadvantaged backgrounds. About a fifth of the pupils have joined the school part-way through their secondary education. Both these figures are well above national averages.

## Information about this inspection

We carried out this inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- We met with trustees, the chief executive officer and the academy board. We also met senior and departmental leaders, teachers, members of support staff and pupils of different ages, including students in the sixth form. We had telephone conversations with a representative of the local authority and with the Enterprise

Learning Alliance. We went to an assembly and tutor periods. We observed behaviour around the school site and at breaktimes.

- We looked at a wide range of relevant documents about the school, including published performance information and information available on the school's website.
- We read the responses to 55 pupil questionnaires and 59 staff surveys. We considered responses to Ofsted's Parent View, which included 49 responses, and read 31 free-text written comments.
- We did deep dives in: English, mathematics, science, French, history and art. In each one, we visited lessons and looked at pupils' work. We spoke to curriculum leaders, teachers and pupils within each of these subject areas.
- We examined the safeguarding checks that the trust carries out when it employs staff and scrutinised safeguarding records. Inspectors also met the school's safeguarding leads.

### **Inspection team**

Keith Pailthorpe, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Philip Storey	Ofsted Inspector
Susan Conway	Ofsted Inspector
Ann Fearon	Ofsted Inspector

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