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7 September 2021

Lee Kane  
Headteacher  
Astor Secondary School  
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Dear Mr Kane

**Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Astor Secondary School**

Following my visit to your school on 6 July 2021, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the monitoring inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions that have been taken to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8(2) of the Education Act 2005 and has taken place because the school has received three successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections.

This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic began. I discussed the impact of the pandemic with you and have taken that into account in my evaluation.

Having considered the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time:

**Leaders and those responsible for governance are taking effective action in order for the school to become a good school.**

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that all subject areas embed the planned improvements to provision for disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND)
- continue the assessment of pupils' reading skills to target support for those at an early stage of reading and fully implement leaders' ambitious plans to establish a culture of reading in the school.

## **Context**

There have been some significant changes in the leadership of the school since the last section 5 inspection in January 2020. One deputy headteacher has left and you have restructured pastoral support at the school to form a new welfare and well-being team. Governance has been restructured. Five new trustees have been appointed and the trust board is now supported through the work of three committees. The school has also changed its name.

At the time of this inspection, Year 11 and Year 13 pupils were not attending their usual lessons because their courses had finished.

## **Main findings**

You, your leadership team and trustees share a clear vision of the improvements to the quality of education that are required to raise the achievement of all pupils. You have raised expectations, and improvement plans make it clear to all staff what still needs to be done. Despite the many challenges of the pandemic, staff are working with energy and good humour to achieve the school's aims and they praise the support and clear direction that you provide.

Subject leaders have adjusted their curriculum plans to take account of gaps in pupils' knowledge caused due to disrupted learning during the pandemic. Some have trialled strategies and resources in their classrooms and developed training materials to share their work with other staff. However, due to periods of time when the school was only open to some children due to COVID-19 restrictions, this has limited their opportunities to do this. Plans are in place to disseminate these and other resources and strategies more widely across the school next academic year.

You recognise the impact the pandemic has had on pupils at transition points. You have made sure that Year 11 pupils have a longer sixth-form induction programme with a blend of in-school and online activities to help them prepare for studying their chosen subjects next year. Similarly, Year 13 students have been receiving advice and guidance to support their next steps into university or employment.

The trust has overseen an audit of the school's provision for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND and has ensured significant changes are underway. Leaders have improved their assessment and identification of pupils' needs. Building on this, the SEND team have started work to improve the information being made available to teachers and teaching assistants. A programme of training is scheduled over the next year to support staff in boosting pupils' learning across all subjects. Senior leaders are very aware of current inconsistencies in provision across the school and have planned monitoring systems to assess the impact of this work.

You have identified reading as a whole-school priority and have purchased a range of new resources and books to promote reading. However, the pandemic has hindered your work to embed a strong culture of reading across the school. Leaders, and pupils themselves, recognise that standards of reading and writing have dipped during the three national lockdowns. This term, leaders have conducted reading assessments and established support for pupils who are at an early stage of reading. Some subject leads have attended reading training and have plans to share strategies with colleagues to boost reading within subjects. This work is at an early stage and needs time to become embedded.

Trustees have a firm grasp of the strengths of the school and the key areas still to develop, and have adapted how they work to ensure a greater level of challenge. They commissioned a review of the curriculum, but this has been paused until next year due to the pandemic. Training and links with leaders of other schools have strengthened the support and challenge that trustees are able to offer you and your senior leaders.

### **Additional support**

Leaders and teachers value the support and challenge provided by the trust and the training that is made available to them. Staff have welcomed the current whole-school focus on curriculum development and improving reading skills and standards for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND. Leaders benefit from the school's long-standing collaboration with a research school. Teachers benefit from their membership of professional associations and their networking with local schools.

### **Evidence**

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, other senior leaders, the multi-academy trust chief executive officer and two trustees to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I considered various documents, including the school's improvement plans and examples of curriculum planning documents.

I had discussions with staff and pupils, visited lessons and looked at pupils' work. I considered the responses to Ofsted's Parent View questionnaire, including 65 free-text responses. I also took account of the views expressed in 62 staff questionnaires.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, and the chief executive officer of the Dover Federation for the Arts Multi Academy Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Kent. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Matthew Newberry  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**