

Inspection of Astor Secondary School

Astor Avenue, Dover, Kent CT17 0AS

Inspection dates: 31 October, 1 November and 16 November 2023

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Requires improvement

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Good

Sixth-form provision

Good

Previous inspection grade

Requires improvement

The headteacher of this school is Lee Kane. The school is part of Samphire Star 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, David Meades and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Ryan Davies.

What is it like to attend this school?

While the pupils who attend regularly are happy in this inclusive school, too many pupils in key stages 3 and 4 are absent and so miss out on their learning. When they do attend, they know that staff will welcome them and offer them extra help to catch up on the gaps in their learning. For too many this is too late and not sustained. As a result, many pupils achieve very poorly in GCSE examinations.

The picture is very different in the sixth form. Here, students make the most of the exciting and wide variety of courses on offer. They show dedication and achieve well, gaining the grades and support to move on to their post-16 choices.

In lessons, pupils try hard and respond well to the warm and productive relationships that staff establish. There is a sense of respect running through the whole school community. Pupils and families from under-represented groups are welcomed to celebrate and share their culture and heritage through clubs and events. Pupils appreciate the wide range of extra-curricular activities that include sports, arts and music.

Many parents and carers who responded to Ofsted's parent survey, support the work of the school. One parent summed up the views of many, saying, 'This school cares so much about the children.'

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

Everyone at the school is fully aware that pupils' poor attendance limits the intended impact of the curriculum and, therefore, pupils' overall achievement. In every lesson there are pupils who have missed important prior learning and so need help to understand that before they can build further knowledge. Staff are endlessly patient, adapting and supporting pupils, even offering time during weekends and after school. This has some success but is not sustainable, not least for the well-being of staff who care deeply.

For those pupils who do attend regularly, there is an ambitious and well-considered curriculum for all. Pupils who join the school with limited English are helped to quickly build their language skills and take relevant qualifications. Staff use their detailed knowledge of pupils to adapt tasks, so that all can learn well. This is particularly true for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

The school recognises that many pupils need additional support to become fluent and confident readers. Staff identify these pupils quickly and work with them to develop essential knowledge and skills. However, the 'intervention groups' are currently arranged around timetabling practicalities rather than what individual pupils most need. This approach lacks urgency and hampers the effectiveness of this important work.

In most subjects, the curriculum is carefully considered and sequenced. Pupils build on their learning well and are expected to use technical vocabulary accurately. Teachers check that all pupils, including those with SEND, secure the knowledge they need. However, in a few subjects, the curriculum is not yet planned with the same degree of precision. Here, pupils do not learn as well as they could because teachers are not clear what needs to be taught and when. This lack of clarity also makes it difficult for staff to adapt learning for pupils with SEND.

While the proportion of pupils taking the full suite of English Baccalaureate subjects at key stage 4 is very low, all pupils are, nonetheless, expected to study subjects that challenge them. For example, increasing numbers of pupils study three sciences. Students in the sixth form are well prepared for their next steps, including those who go on to higher education.

While current pupils who attend well make suitable progress through the planned curriculum in most subjects, outcomes in published GCSE examinations are poor across the board. Too many pupils did not gain the grades they could have in 2022 and 2023. Leaders are committed to improving outcomes for all. They have analysed reasons for pupils' poor attendance and high mobility. They have put in multiple actions which are showing some signs of success. Notably, despite the extra work and potential impact on examination results, they ensure that the school welcomes all pupils, including those who have missed long periods of schooling and so have extensive gaps in their knowledge.

The school has high expectations of pupils' behaviour. Almost all pupils conduct themselves calmly and considerately in lessons and around the school. Very occasionally, pupils do not behave as the school expects. When this occurs, the school has clear systems that support the pupil to improve their behaviour. Expert pastoral staff ensure that pupils' welfare is a top priority throughout the school.

Pupils receive a broad personal development programme. They are taught about healthy relationships, about staying physically and mentally well, and managing risks. Pupils value this and say it helps them navigate growing up. Across the school, there is well considered and comprehensive careers guidance. Pupils find this useful and are well equipped to make decisions about their futures.

Leaders make decisions in the interests of pupils and their families, ensuring that everyone is included and valued. Trust staff and those responsible for governance know the school's strengths and weaknesses. They provide helpful support. Staff are proud to work here and are committed to the pupils and the wider community. They know that leaders are mindful of their workload and well-being. Staff appreciate the helpful training they receive, which helps them improve in their roles.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Too many pupils do not attend school regularly. This is a significant contributory factor to these pupils achieving less well. The school should further refine their approaches to increasing attendance and reducing persistent absence.
- In a few subjects the curriculum is not sufficiently coherent or sequenced. In these subjects, pupils do not build their knowledge over time as securely as they could. The school should ensure that the curriculum across all subjects is as precisely planned as in the strongest, including for pupils with SEND.
- Work to support pupils who are not yet fluent or confident readers is not fully developed. Currently, it lacks urgency. The school needs to sharpen its focus on supporting all pupils to read well, so that they can access their full curriculum successfully.

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

Unique reference number	138167
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10288018
Type of school	Secondary Comprehensive
School category	Academy 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	795
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	91
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Ryan Davies
CEO of the trust	David Meades
Headteacher	Lee Kane
Website	www.astorschool.com
Date of previous inspection	6 July 2021, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is part of Samphire Star Education Trust. The trust runs four primary and secondary schools in the Dover area.
- The headteacher has been in post since 2016.
- The school currently uses two registered alternative providers.
- 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.
- Through no fault of the school, two inspectors returned to the school for further inspection activities on 16 November 2023.
- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the second routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The 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 school leaders, including the headteacher, senior leaders, the special educational needs coordinator and subject leaders. They also spoke to the trust's chief executive officer and met with three trustees and two members of the joint school development council.
- Deep dives were carried out in these subjects: English, mathematics, modern foreign languages, history, art and design and vocational enterprise subjects. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. Additionally, inspectors looked at wider samples of pupils' work, including the work of disadvantaged pupils.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, 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 safeguarding culture that puts pupils' interests first.
- The inspectors gathered evidence to explore the impact of pupils' behaviour and attendance, and the school's wider curriculum.
- An inspector spoke to the two alternative providers used by the school.
- Inspectors talked to pupils and staff throughout the inspection to gain their views about the school. This included the views of pupils and staff submitted via Ofsted's confidential surveys.
- Inspectors considered the views of parents through Ofsted's parent survey.

Inspection team

Maria Roberts, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Simon Potten	Ofsted Inspector
Lorraine Clarke	Ofsted Inspector

Sue Bzikot

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Lucy English, lead inspector (16
November)

His Majesty's Inspector

Chris Ellison (16 November)

His Majesty's Inspector

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