

Astor Secondary School

Address: Astor Avenue, Dover, Kent, CT17 0AS

Unique reference number (URN): 138167

Inspection report: 10 March 2026

Exceptional	
Strong standard	
Expected standard	
Needs attention	
Urgent improvement	

Safeguarding standards met

The safeguarding standards are met. This means that leaders and/or those responsible for governance and oversight fulfil their specific responsibilities and have established an open culture in which safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and concerns are actively identified, acted upon and managed. As a result, pupils are made safer and feel safe.

How we evaluate safeguarding

When we inspect schools for safeguarding, they can have the following outcomes:

- **Met:** The school has an open and positive culture of safeguarding. All legal requirements are met.
- **Not met:** The school has not created an open and positive culture of safeguarding. Not all legal requirements are met.

Expected standard

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard 

Leaders prioritise pupils' personal development. They offer pupils effective pastoral care, which is tailored to meet pupils' individual needs. Appropriately trained staff provide pupils with targeted support to help them manage their feelings and emotions successfully. This helps strengthen pupils' self-esteem and resilience. Pupils also develop confidence and social skills through a range of leadership opportunities, such as being peer coaches, prefects and reading mentors. Leaders draw on a range of professionals and their expertise to support the mental health and wellbeing of vulnerable and disadvantaged pupils effectively.

Pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), take part in a wide range of enrichment activities. These include clubs such as sports, dance, robotics and creative activities, which help pupils develop their interests and talents. Educational visits, including international trips, excursions to London and Canterbury, and university experiences, broaden pupils' horizons and contribute well to their cultural development. Leaders monitor participation carefully to ensure that disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND access these opportunities.

The personal, social and health education curriculum is carefully planned and sequenced. It reflects the needs of the local community and is adapted when new risks emerge. As a result, pupils develop secure, age-appropriate knowledge about topics such as healthy relationships, consent, online safety, and mental and physical health. Pupils learn about different cultures and religions and understand the importance of treating everyone fairly. They value individual differences, listen respectfully to others and appreciate the diversity in society. Pupils understand why fairness, respect, the rule of law and concepts such as democracy matter in their own lives. As a result, pupils have a secure understanding of how to be responsible and respectful citizens.

Pupils receive appropriate careers education, information, advice and guidance. As a result, they are well informed about their next steps in education, employment or training and are prepared for life beyond school.

Post 16 provision

Expected standard 

Leaders have created a highly inclusive post-16 provision. They go out of their way to offer a place to students who may otherwise not have the opportunity to have a sixth-form experience. Leaders ensure that the curriculum meets the needs of students effectively, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. In addition, where needed, the curriculum is adapted carefully to cater for the needs of students who have starting points that are different from what would typically be expected. Typically, students achieve well from their individual starting points. This is reflected in their work and how well they build on their previous knowledge and understanding.

There is a well-considered programme on offer to enhance and enrich students' academic learning and further develop their independence. Students value the care and support they receive from staff. In return, they are keen to make an active contribution to the school and

act as positive role models to younger pupils. Students benefit from a well-designed careers information, education, advice and guidance programme that supports them to reflect on how to meet their aspirations. Consequently, students leave school well prepared for the next steps.

Needs attention ●

Achievement

Needs attention ●

Over time, pupils, including those who are disadvantaged and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, have not achieved well in national examinations at the end of key stage 4. Too many pupils in key stages 3 and 4 do not attend regularly enough and miss out on learning. This limits their overall achievement. That said, most pupils secure places in education, employment or training when they leave school.

Leaders strive for the best for pupils and are taking decisive steps to address weaknesses in the curriculum and teaching. Their actions are beginning to make a positive difference. Pupils currently in the school are building their knowledge and skills with greater confidence than in the past. Leaders accurately assess the starting points of pupils who join mid-year and provide support to help them catch up. As a result, these pupils' achievement is improving over time.

Attendance and behaviour

Needs attention ●

Too many pupils do not attend school as often as they should. Rates of persistent absenteeism remain too high. Leaders are rightly prioritising and have clear ambitions for improving pupils' attendance, but in the past, their approach has not brought about sustained improvements. Leaders have recently introduced attendance strategies that enable them to track pupils' attendance carefully and follow up concerns promptly. This includes drawing on the expertise of other professionals when necessary. While this is improving attendance rates, leaders recognise that there is more to do to ensure pupils attend school more regularly.

Leaders and staff have high expectations for pupils' behaviour, which they model consistently. Relationships between pupils and staff are warm, respectful and supportive. This creates a calm and orderly environment. Staff apply the school's behaviour policy well, including making appropriate adjustments for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. As a result, lessons and social times are typically settled. Pupils are kind and interact positively with one another. Most pupils are not concerned about bullying or derogatory language. They trust adults to deal efficiently with any worries or concerns they have.

Curriculum and teaching

Needs attention ●

There is too much variability in how well the curriculum is taught. For example, staff do not use assessment well enough to adjust their teaching or meet the needs of individual pupils.

Where this happens, pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, do not access the intended learning as well as they should.

The curriculum is well organised, broad and ambitious. Most teachers have secure subject knowledge and benefit from ongoing professional learning. Leaders have a clear and well-informed understanding of the quality of the curriculum and teaching across the school. They have accurately identified the aspects of teaching that need further development and are taking appropriate actions. However, this work is in the early stages.

Leaders have identified that when pupils first join the school, they have significant gaps in their reading, writing and mathematics skills. They ensure that pupils receive effective support to help them catch up quickly. For example, leaders have introduced a bespoke curriculum for pupils in Year 7 to accelerate this aspect of their work. Pupils at the earlier stages of learning to read receive suitable support to help them become fluent. Leaders' actions to support those disadvantaged pupils who struggle to read fluently are working particularly well.

Inclusion

Needs attention 

Disadvantaged pupils do not achieve as well as they should. This is because, until recently, leaders' evaluation of the impact of the pupil premium strategy lacked precision. Despite this, the strategy is having some positive impact on current pupils. For example, pupils' reading and attendance are starting to improve.

Staff's knowledge and skills in how to adjust their teaching to support pupils who face barriers to their learning are too varied. Leaders are providing ongoing training to further develop staff expertise in using the school's approaches to support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) or those who face other barriers to learning. Leaders accurately identify the needs of pupils, including those with SEND. They have a secure understanding of pupils' needs and starting points. This includes the high proportion of pupils who join part way through the year.

Leaders work effectively with external professionals, including the virtual school, and parents and carers to gather information about the support that individual pupils require. They have established targeted approaches to support individual pupils and groups. For instance, initiatives such as 'the hub' are beginning to make a difference, especially for pupils who struggle with anxiety or attendance. Leaders ensure that any alternative provision the school uses is suitable and safe. Decisions are made in pupils' best interests.

Leadership and governance

Needs attention 

Until recently, leaders did not act quickly enough to identify and address key priorities for improvement, particularly in curriculum and teaching. Leadership and staffing have also been through a period of turbulence, which affected the pace of change. As a result, leaders have not yet secured the necessary improvements in pupils' achievement, including for disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Since the recent change in leadership, the rate of improvement has accelerated. Leaders have accurately identified the areas that require attention, and their actions are now

appropriately focused. This is evident in sustained improvements in pupils' behaviour and in rising attendance, although attendance remains below the national average. Leaders have introduced a range of well-informed, effective actions to address other aspects of their work, but many of these are still in the early stages of implementation.

The trust, school leaders and trustees work in partnership to ensure that the school continues to improve in all areas. Those responsible for governance are knowledgeable and fulfil their roles effectively.

Leaders and trustees know their pupils and community well. They ensure that meeting the needs of vulnerable pupil groups is central to their decision-making. Leaders have clear oversight of the progress that these pupils make and use this to help shape improvement priorities. The professional learning programme has been strengthened and is carefully designed to build staff expertise. Staff, including early career teachers, feel well supported. They appreciate that leaders ensure that staff workload is considered carefully when making important changes to the school's work.

What it's like to be a pupil at this school

Historically, pupils have not achieved well enough. Despite leaders' appropriate actions, published outcomes remain below the national average for too many pupils. There are too many inconsistencies in how the curriculum is taught. For instance, there is too much variability in how well staff use checks on pupils' knowledge in order to adapt teaching or adjust the curriculum for pupils needing extra support. Additionally, pupil attendance over time, including for those who are disadvantaged, is below national figures. This limits pupils' learning and their achievement. Attendance is improving, but leaders recognise that there is more to do.

The picture is very different in the sixth form. Students typically attend school regularly and achieve well from their individual starting points. Generally, the curriculum is taught well. Students receive effective careers education and guidance on how to meet their aspirations.

Staff know the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities well. They understand the barriers these pupils and other vulnerable groups, including the high proportion of pupils who arrive mid-year, have to learning. For instance, they use this understanding to provide tailored aids and resources that help pupils access the curriculum. These pupils generally learn successfully alongside their peers.

Pupils feel well supported because staff know them as individuals and want them to succeed. Adults warmly welcome pupils each morning. They check that pupils are ready to learn. This creates a calm start to the day. Lessons run smoothly due to clear routines that most pupils follow. At social times, pupils generally mix well. When bullying or unkindness occurs, staff deal with it effectively. Pupils trust staff to act fairly. They feel safe in school.

The school provides pupils with an appropriate personal development programme. Pupils benefit from a wide range of experiences and opportunities, including leadership roles that broaden their horizons.

Next steps

- Leaders should ensure that the school's pupil premium strategy is well informed and evaluated carefully so that it leads to a consistently positive impact on these pupils' education.
 - Leaders should work to ensure that teachers skilfully use assessment information and make appropriate adjustments to teaching or the curriculum so that pupils, particularly those with special educational needs and/or disabilities or those who are disadvantaged, learn and achieve as well as they should.
 - Leaders should ensure that their attendance strategy is fully embedded and effective in continuing to improve overall attendance, particularly for disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. They should also make sure that their actions result in reducing persistent absence further for all pupil groups.
 - Leaders should ensure the school's improvement actions are delivered effectively to bring about rapid improvements in all pupils' achievement so that pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, employment or training.
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About this inspection

This 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 (CEO), David Meades, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Carol Boxall.

Inspectors carried out this full inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. Following our renewed inspection framework, all inspections are now led by His Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs) or by Ofsted Inspectors (OIs) who have previously served as HMIs.

Inspection activities:

Inspectors spoke with the headteacher, other senior and curriculum leaders, staff and pupils. The lead inspector spoke with 6 trustees, including the chair of trustees, and 3 governors from the local governing board. They also met with the CEO and governance professional of the trust.

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.

Inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The chair of trustees took up her role in October 2025.

In September 2024, new senior leaders took up their posts, with the exception of the headteacher.

The school makes use of one registered alternative provision.

Headteacher: Lee Kane

Lead inspector:

Louise Walker, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Eliot Hodges, Ofsted Inspector

Christie Ransom, Ofsted Inspector

David Stevenson, His Majesty's Inspector

Facts and figures used on inspection

The data was used by the inspector(s) during the inspection. More recent data may have been published since the inspection took place.

 This data is from 10 March 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

770

Below average

What does this mean?

The total number of pupils currently at this school and how this compares to other schools of this phase in England.

National average: 1,067

School capacity

1,230

Close to average

What does this mean?

The total number of pupils who can attend the school and how this compares to other schools of this phase in England.

National average: 1,153

Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)

61.97%

Well above average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years.

National average: 28.9%

Pupils with an education, health and care (EHC) plan

1.69%

Below average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with an education, health and care plan. This covers pupils with more support than is available through special educational needs support.

National average: 3.09%

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

22.34%

Well above average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with reported special educational support needs at the school.

National average: 13.4%

Location deprivation

Well above average

What does this mean?

Based on the English Indices of Deprivation (2019) and the school's location, we have calculated whether the school is located in a more or less deprived area.

Resourced Provision or SEND Unit (if applicable)

No resourced provision

What does this mean?

Whether school has Resourced Provision or SEND unit (if applicable).

All pupils' performance

English and maths GCSE

Percentage of pupils who achieved grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	10.1%	45.4%	Below
2023/24 (final)	8.7%	45.9%	Below
2022/23 (final)	8.8%	45.3%	Below

Attainment 8

A measure of pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	27.9	46.0	Below
2023/24 (final)	28.6	45.9	Below
2022/23 (final)	26.8	46.3	Below

Progress 8

How much progress pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	-1.04	-0.03	Below
2022/23 (final)	-1.37	-0.03	Below

Disadvantaged pupils' performance

Disadvantaged pupils are those who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years and children looked after.

Disadvantaged pupils' English and maths GCSE grade 5 or above

Percentage of disadvantaged pupils achieving grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	2.5%	25.8%	Below
2023/24 (final)	6.3%	25.8%	Below
2022/23 (final)	4.8%	25.2%	Below

Disadvantaged pupils' Attainment 8

A measure of disadvantaged pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	22.8	34.9	Below
2023/24 (final)	25.4	34.6	Below
2022/23 (final)	22.0	35.0	Below

Disadvantaged pupils' Progress 8

How much progress disadvantaged pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	-1.27	-0.57	Below
2022/23 (final)	-1.75	-0.57	Below

Disadvantaged pupils' performance gap

Disadvantaged pupils are those who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years and children looked after. The school disadvantage gap is the difference between the performance of the school's disadvantaged pupils compared to the performance of all non-disadvantaged pupils nationally.

Disadvantaged pupils' English and maths GCSE grade 5 or above

Percentage of disadvantaged pupils who achieved grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2024/25 (revised)	2.5%	53.1%	-50.6 pp
2023/24 (final)	6.3%	53.1%	-46.8 pp
2022/23 (final)	4.8%	52.4%	-47.7 pp

Disadvantaged pupils' Attainment 8

A measure of disadvantaged pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2024/25 (revised)	22.8	50.4	-27.6
2023/24 (final)	25.4	50.0	-24.6
2022/23 (final)	22.0	50.3	-28.3

Disadvantaged pupils' Progress 8

How much progress disadvantaged pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2023/24 (final)	-1.27	0.16	-1.43
2022/23 (final)	-1.75	0.17	-1.92

Destinations after 16

Destinations after 16

Percentage of pupils staying in education or employment for at least 2 terms after the end of secondary school (key stage 4).

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023 leavers (provisional)	79%	91%	Below
2022 leavers (revised)	85%	93%	Below
2021 leavers (revised)	83%	94%	Below

16 to 18 performance

A-level average point score

The average points that students achieved per A-level entry.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	22.81	34.99	Below
2023/24 (final)	20.37	34.38	Below
2022/23 (final)	23.56	34.16	Below

A-level value added

A score showing students’ progress between the end of key stage 4 and the end of their academic qualification studies.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	-0.3	0.0	Below
2023/24 (revised)	-0.5	0.0	Below

Absence

Overall absence

The percentage of all possible mornings and afternoons missed due to absence from school (for whatever reason, whether authorised or unauthorised) across all pupils.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (2 term)	12.9%	8.1%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	15.7%	8.9%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	16.1%	9.0%	Above

Persistent absence

The percentage of pupils missing 10% or more of their possible mornings and afternoons.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (2 term)	45.8%	21.9%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	53.4%	25.6%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	53.5%	26.5%	Above

Our grades explained

Exceptional 

Practice is exceptional: of the highest standard nationally. Other schools can learn from it.

Strong standard ●

The school reaches a strong standard. Leaders are working above the standard expected of them.

Expected standard ●

The school is fulfilling the expected standard of education and/or care. This means they are following the standard set out in statutory and non-statutory legislation and the professional standards expected of them.

Needs attention ●

The expected standards are not met but leaders are likely able to make the necessary improvements.

Urgent improvement ●

The school needs to make urgent improvements to provide the expected standard of education and/or care.

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