

Dover Christ Church Academy

Melbourne Avenue, Whitfield, Dover, Kent CT16 2EG

Inspection dates

5–6 October 2016

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
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

- In several subjects such as science, French and geography, pupils do not make enough progress, especially in Years 10 and 11.
- The success rate for sixth form students who need to retake English and/or mathematics is very low.
- A few teachers do not clamp down quickly if pupils do not pay attention in lessons.
- The quality of teaching and learning varies considerably within and between subjects. For example, whether work is at the right level of challenge, the focus on literacy and the effectiveness of the questions posed to pupils.
- A few girls' and disadvantaged pupils' low attendance prevents them from making consistent and secure progress.

The school has the following strengths

- In the last two years, the principal, senior leaders and governors have not ceased in their efforts to appoint well-qualified staff so that all pupils learn consistently well in all subjects.
- Much has been achieved in terms of raising pupils' aspirations, developing a more academic curriculum and generating overall improvements in progress.
- The differences between pupils' progress have diminished as funds for different groups, such as the disadvantaged, have been spent well. The most able pupils' progress is improving.
- Provision for pupils' personal, moral, and social development is strong. It contributes to their sensible behaviour around the school and to the great majority of them wanting to learn.
- Pupils feel safe and are happy, and the great majority behave well in lessons.
- Aspen 2, the resource base for pupils and students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, gives these pupils the best possible care and support for their individual physical, learning and development needs. Staff are dedicated, well trained and highly effective in all they do.
- The sixth form is increasingly popular and well led, with improving academic and work-related outcomes. Students mature into thoughtful young adults.
- Where staffing is stable, teachers assess work accurately and pupils respond enthusiastically to the help they receive and enjoy learning.
- Linked to the school's sponsor, Canterbury Christ Church University (CCCU), trustees' and governors' experience and practical support contribute much to the school's growth and development.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve pupils' and students' progress, by:
 - identifying, especially in those subjects in which pupils do not do well, the main elements of weak knowledge in key stage 4 pupils' understanding and clarifying the essential foundations of knowledge to be mastered at key stage 3
 - implementing plans in place for more lessons in GCSE English and/or mathematics for sixth form students who lack these qualifications
 - insisting that all teachers follow the school's behaviour policy and do not accept any distractions in lessons
 - intensifying actions and devising new ways to raise attendance, particularly for girls and disadvantaged pupils
 - persevering with actions taken to appoint qualified, subject-specialist teachers and to support subject leaders new to their roles.
- Strengthen the effectiveness of teaching and learning, by:
 - checking that all pupils, particularly the most able, do not do work that is too easy for them and, when necessary, that more challenging work is prepared for those who are ready to move on
 - making sure that all teachers stress subject-specific vocabulary, explore the meaning of words and promote high-quality writing
 - developing the style and variety of questions that teachers pose so they make pupils think hard and justify their answers
 - extending the sharing of expertise and successful teaching and learning that already exists in several subjects, through the school's coaching and mentoring programme.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Since the previous inspection, the principal and other senior leaders have not wavered in their determination and passion (a word which many of them use) to give all pupils and students the best possible education. They have achieved a great deal in two years and many aspects of the school's work are to be celebrated. For example, perseverance in promoting an academic and ambitious curriculum, an upward trend in overall GCSE and sixth form results, and pupils' increasingly good behaviour and relationships with each other and staff. At the same time, leadership of Aspen 2 has strengthened its successful combination of nurture with education and preparation for the adult world.
- Staff morale is high – with almost all of those who responded to their questionnaire being proud to work at the school. They agree that there is a culture of high aspirations for pupils and students and a calm atmosphere, both confirmed during the inspection. An external consultant rightly observed that 'the integration of Aspen 2 pupils into mainstream lessons, when appropriate, is held in high esteem by all and adds to the ethos of the academy'.
- Despite governors' and leaders' best efforts, achieving good teaching, learning and outcomes is thwarted by the struggle to appoint specialist staff. Permanent appointments are only made if teachers generate the rapid progress that pupils need to make. There is a close correlation between subjects in which pupils do not achieve well and staffing issues. In the case of science, as the move to GCSE-only qualifications evolved, too many course changes also contributed to underperformance in this subject.
- Professional development is good for teachers working towards or recently attaining qualified status, for those who are experienced, and for middle leaders new to their roles. CCCU contributes to training and mentoring and has loaned staff to fill gaps. A leader observed that training no longer focuses on outcomes and pass grades but on teaching for all pupils to achieve their best.
- Senior leaders accurately identify where teaching is not strong and plan a mixture of generic and individual steps for improvement. Specific training is directed to inspire teachers working with the Year 7 and 8 grammar streams to have the highest aspirations, and towards all staff using information about pupils' progress to plan their next steps. Aspen 2 teachers and teaching assistants (TAs) attend courses to match pupils' needs; for example, on sign-language or particular medical conditions.
- The subject-specialist leaders in place all have the energy and drive to improve each pupil's outcome; they are clear where weaknesses exist, how to tackle them and support unqualified teachers. The science leader, for example, is determined to identify the ingredients of the department's success with the separate sciences and morph them into all courses.
- In all years, the curriculum is focused on more pupils, especially the most able, studying English Baccalaureate subjects, so numbers learning at least two sciences, geography, history and French have gone up this year. This complements the school's high aspirations but is not helped by staffing issues. These also explain the absence of a rich programme of extra-curricular activities with no music, for example (soon to be

rectified). Sports opportunities are plentiful and these are the most popular.

- Some pupils do not feel that they consider and learn about the world of work and their future options enough. Leaders acknowledge that they need to allocate more time to pupils' careers education and to include more detailed discussions for key stage 3 pupils.
- Alongside matching pupils' and students' individual needs, the Aspen 2 curriculum is focused on literacy, numeracy, learning to share, and understanding society. Pupils and students go swimming and have many trips into the local community to learn gardening or have meals in restaurants to develop social skills.
- Leaders do much to encourage parents' support and involvement, particularly those with a child in Aspen 2. Some parents praised the school's use of technology for communication; others did not but practically all those who wrote comments mentioned how happy their child was at the school. The school's website has useful documents for parents, on e-safety for example.
- The school receives weekly reports on off-site pupils' attendance, behaviour and any issues. A school vice-principal sits on the Enterprise Learning Alliance (ELA) management committee and visits the different sites regularly, and the ELA deputy headteacher visits the school, so discussions about pupils' progress are regular.
- Most pupils are not familiar with the terms 'extremism' or 'British values' but they are aware of the principles and concepts of both. The well-considered personal, social and health (PSH) and spiritual, moral, social and cultural programmes touch on many aspects of democracy, tolerance and respect, for example. These are strongly reinforced by pupils and students socialising with those based in Aspen 2. Religious education lessons have started this year, extending pupils' consideration of other faiths and spiritual issues.

Governance of the school

- The governing body, including several members who are also trustees, has an exceptional wealth of experience in education in a variety of settings, including working at CCCU. They have bold and imaginative plans to address staffing in the future and to expand the school's successful Aspen 2 provision.
- The principal has 100% support of the governors, who devote much time to probing the school's standards, understanding the factors behind its weaknesses and exploring solutions. They express delight with the overall rise to emerge from the Department for Education's (DfE) new, provisional progress measures but accept that 'outcomes are a challenge'. The website is slowly being redesigned to meet all statutory requirements.
- Governors evaluate whether additional funds for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, catch-up pupils (who had not attained the expected levels in English and mathematics by the end of primary school) and disadvantaged pupils are spent carefully. They particularly consider pupils eligible for more than one source of funding.
- The principal prepares detailed annual reports which show that the allocation of funds is reviewed thoughtfully and changes are made each year. One particular activity was found to be most successful for Aspen 2 pupils but not for those in the main school so it continues only for the first group.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Governors are fully involved in overseeing procedures and actions. Policy documents used in the school are up to date but those on its website are not. Some recent additions to the DfE's best practice guidance have yet to be actioned.
- Teaching staff have completed online courses so they are up to speed on their duties and roles in addressing any signs of extremism or child abuse, whistleblowing and other sensitive issues. Governors and leaders keep a careful eye on vulnerable pupils and all the pupils met during the inspection feel very safe, well cared for and secure.
- Aspen 2 leaders and staff adhere to medical and safety procedures with meticulous attention to detail. They instigate adjustments within the unit and the rest of the school: for example, if there are issues with wheelchair access.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The main reason that this aspect of the school's work needs to improve is the inconsistency within and between subjects. Some extremely good learning exists, with rapid progress and enjoyment evident. In one science lesson, a pupil proudly commented that 'this is completely new and I'm getting it' but in another class pupils did not grasp the key concept being presented, partly because its relevance to real life was not made clear.
- Occasionally, teachers' subject knowledge lets them down so their explanations are not crisp or they accept poorly presented work. There is no agreed approach to the presentation of work for subjects involving numeracy; pupils draw graphs without rulers, in biro, with no scales or titles. To promote literacy, some teachers make a point of checking that pupils understand what subject-specific words mean and a few explore related words. They also support pupils who struggle to write well-constructed sentences. This does not happen often enough.
- Leaders have recently revised the school's homework policy, recognising that they have not yet established a culture that it must be done. Until all teachers put homework up on the school's website, parental support, and consistency in pupils' learning at home, will not emerge in all subjects.
- However, many teachers do follow the school's marking policy of giving pupils helpful comments and advice and time to think about how they can improve. When the policy is followed and teachers assess the quality of work accurately, pupils learn well – unless they cannot read the teacher's writing!
- The effectiveness of questions posed to pupils varies between subjects and classes. If questions are only simple or only require short answers, pupils' thinking and understanding does not deepen and complex work is not mastered. Examples of good progress, where questions made pupils think hard and justify their responses, were a feature of several successful lessons during the inspection.
- Some extremely good learning exists with rapid progress and enjoyment evident. A few Year 9 pupils were clear that they make progress when 'lessons are fun and teachers help us'. In some classes, the use of more stimulating resources would have helped pupils, particularly lower attainers, to grasp the topic.

- The quality of TAs' work in the main school was described as being less effective than in Aspen 2 in the last inspection report. This is no longer the case – enthusiastic TAs balance support and guidance with knowing when to encourage independent work.
- Leaders have made sure that teachers know pupils' starting points so they can plan work that is not too easy or too difficult. However, in set and mixed-ability classes, pupils do occasionally struggle to keep up or some, particularly the most able, sit waiting as they have completed the work quickly.
- The focus on learning and good progress was clear in Aspen 2. Explaining reproduction with three groups of pupils, all with slightly different starting points, the teacher and pupils only used the proper words. A link to pupils' understanding of privacy was incorporated.
- When all Aspen 2 pupils explore phonics, the groups, taught by stage not age, use the best resources for their needs. They match cards with the same word with or without capitals, use sensory skills, explore homophones such as 'plain' and 'plane' or discuss where you might sit on a pew. The blend of teaching and nurturing skills that the teachers and TAs provide is outstanding.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. It is entwined with the high-quality care for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities in the main school and Aspen 2. Expertise within the latter is shared with all school teachers and support staff, meaning that pupils receive clear guidance about potential risks in their lives and how to deal with them.
- Asked to describe the school, a pupil responded, 'Brilliant' and explained that 'things are sorted if there's a problem'. Pupils feel confident that they learn about safety, the dangers of mobile phones and social media. They know a member of staff who they would speak to if they had any concerns about their own or their friends' problems.
- No pupils said they had experience of sexist, homophobic or racist language – the latter was reinforced when talking to minority ethnic pupils. Despite a few parents' concerns about bullying, pupils acknowledged that it happens but gave examples of how staff tackle it quickly and it stops.
- The lack of a school council is a weakness in the school's provision for pupil voice to be heard, although one will be organised later in the term. Nevertheless, staff work hard to boost pupils' self-confidence and in many lessons it is clear that pupils are keen to learn.
- The academic work studied by pupils attending off-site provision is blended with therapeutic work to match their individual, personal and behavioural needs. Their personal development has a high profile in all they do and a good proportion of them learn how to behave sensibly and calmly and control their feelings.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. They enjoy working in the new buildings and respect them by not dropping litter and moving sensibly around the site. They can be noisy and boisterous but rarely thoughtless, and are always considerate of Aspen 2 pupils and students.

- In the great majority of classes, pupils are punctual, attentive and buckle down to work quickly. In a very few classes, if a few who chatter are not quickly told to stop, they lose concentration and sometimes distract others.
- Despite improving in the last couple of years, disadvantaged pupils' and some girls' attendance is still not good enough. Leaders appreciate that they must keep trying new ways of getting these pupils to attend regularly.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Progress in the key subject of science has been below expectations in the last two years. Only the 20 or so most-able pupils who take the three separate sciences do well. Their GCSE results, though, were not as impressive in 2016 as they had been in 2015 – an experienced biology teacher left during the two-year course. Progress is slowly getting better for most pupils in Years 7 to 9. It is not as rapid as it needs to be to make up lost ground in Years 10 and 11.
- Other subjects where progress has been, or continues to be, hampered by a lack of specialist teachers include geography, French, physical education, some sports and some technology subjects. With new specialist art and history teachers this year, progress has taken off and pupils are doing well.
- Between 2015 and 2016, the average GCSE point score increased for disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils and both came much closer to the 2015 national figures for non-disadvantaged pupils.
- During the inspection, it was clear that, regardless of their starting points, disadvantaged pupils now make similar progress to others in practically all classes, as do pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Funds for these pupils have successfully contributed to their progress. Counsellors and speech and language specialists have helped to identify the academic or personal anxieties which are barriers to pupils' learning and have supported pupils well.
- The trend in English and mathematics progress has been moving forward steadily in recent years and the unvalidated, new progress measures for 2016 suggest this is certainly the case. The revised grade boundary changes in 2015 hit mathematics hard but with well over 80% of pupils attaining A* to D grades in both these subjects, the potential to make better progress towards national outcomes is considerable. Progress in some mathematics classes is slowed down by pupils lacking concentration.
- Only a few pupils enter the school matching the starting points for identification as high attainers (the most able). The school therefore includes a good number of its middle attainers on entry in its top sets (grammar classes in Years 8 and 9). This contributes to raising aspirations as does participating in the 'brilliant club' for the most able. This gives the school's most able pupils the chance to write philosophical essays, working alongside university lecturers.
- Pupils supported by Year 7 catch-up funding make steady progress, improving their reading using a variety of computer programmes and attending recently introduced literacy sessions. They do spelling tests and define the words and their fluency and comprehension improves.
- Pupils attending Enterprise Learning Alliance (ELA) sites study national curriculum subjects. They make sound progress and Years 10 and 11 pupils are helped to plan their future steps.

- Most pupils in Aspen 2 stay on into the sixth form or move on to further education at local colleges. In terms of mastering basic skills in reading and writing and understanding the social skills required to feel confident in society, these pupils are well prepared for adulthood. Some attain one or more GCSEs and many achieve valuable qualifications which reflect their abilities.
- At the end of Year 11, most pupils proceeded to the school's sixth form or local colleges; a few took up apprenticeships or went into the army. The proportion of students who did not proceed into education or training was below average.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- The sixth form has blossomed this term. More Year 11 pupils chose to stay on at the school and, for the first time, pupils from other schools chose it too. In previous years, several academic subjects were studied by a handful of students but now no subject has fewer than six students. The work-related courses continue to attract good-sized groups.
- The ambitious sixth form leader, new to the role last year, is taking the right steps towards raising achievement and progression routes for students, whatever their starting points; the same is true for students based in Aspen 2. The school is keen to offer the community an inclusive sixth form and, when practicable, adjusts the entrance criteria for students who have particular learning or social needs.
- Students' progress has fluctuated in the past, with only a few subjects showing consistently good outcomes. In 2016, both the average A-level grade achieved and the percentage of A/B grades went up. Several applied A-level and work-related results reflected at least good progress.
- Most subjects in which students did not achieve well in 2016 are no longer taught. Sociology, the most popular one, has staffing issues contributing to less secure progress than in most subjects. The success rate of students retaking GCSE English and/or mathematics has been poor. Despite increased hours for these subjects, they have yet to be a core part of these students' education.
- As in the main school, when students learn well they have to respond to open-ended questions which challenge their written explanations and evaluations. In some groups, teachers are less skilled at getting students to explore topics and share their understanding with others.
- Students appreciate the one-to-one guidance they receive, observing that they are 'expected to be independent' and that teachers 'get us thinking'. The more consistently effective teaching in the sixth form this year has not yet been matched by that in the main school.
- Disadvantaged students make broadly similar progress to others. The most able are encouraged to aim for top universities: a student is applying to Oxford this year. Careers advice and guidance is well-considered and relevant to students' needs. Retention rates are good and practically all sixth formers, including those in Aspen 2 (some of whom had an extra year there), proceeded to further or higher education, training or employment in 2016.
- Many changes have been put in place this year. These include tightly-organised study sessions, work experience for all students to strengthen their programmes of study and employability skills, and using the sponsor university's specialist facilities.

- These were all needed but they will take time to be embedded, as will improving a minority of students' attendance. Although some students help pupils with reading, leaders acknowledge that there are few other ways for them to experience responsibility and leadership.
- The well-planned PSH programme is built into assemblies and tutorial time and addresses personal and other issues which students will face in their futures. It contributes to their preparation to cope with life beyond school – also the top component of Aspen 2's work. Students mature into thoughtful young adults. Discussing British values, one student astutely commented, 'They are human values, not just ours.'

School details

Unique reference number	136175
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10019905

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

Type of school	Modern (non-selective)
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	643
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	105
Appropriate authority	Canterbury Christ Church University
Chair	Kerry Jordan-Daus
Principal	Samantha Williamson
Telephone number	01304 820126
Website	www.dccacademy.org.uk
Email address	principal@dccacademy.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	2–3 October 2014

Information about this school

- The school does not meet requirements on the publication of information on its website about its accessibility plan for pupils who have disabilities, or give full details about its curriculum, how it complies with the public sector equality duty or spends its Year 7 catch-up funding. The school's prospectus does not contain all the required information listed in its funding agreement. Some policy documents have been updated but have not been put on the website.

- The school does not comply with DfE guidance and recommendations on what academies should publish on their websites; for example, full examination results or details about how funding for disadvantaged pupils is to be spent in the current academic year.
- The school is a smaller than average size 11 to 19 mixed comprehensive school with a small sixth form. It is sponsored by Canterbury Christ Church University.
- Boys outnumber girls in all years.
- The proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged is above the national average.
- Almost all pupils are of White British heritage and very few pupils are at the early stages of learning English.
- The school has a well-above-average proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. This is largely because it has a specialist provision unit, Aspen 2, which provides care and education for up to 40 pupils and sixth form students who have a wide range of profound learning and medical needs.
- The school uses the Enterprise Learning Alliance pupil referral unit for less than 10 pupils in Years 8 to 11. All attend full time, except one pupil. Those in Years 8 and 9 attend Northwood, Ashen Tree and Linwood sites according to their key stage 3 needs and all key stage 4 pupils are based at the Dover Skills Centre.
- In recent years, around 50 pupils per year have entered the school after the beginning of Year 7, some direct from other schools and a few, who have not attended the school, from pupil referral units.
- In 2015, the school met the government's floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress by the end of Year 11.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in close to 40 part-lessons including visits to all the specialist rooms in Aspen 2 and several teaching sessions. Some lessons were joint observations with senior leaders. Inspectors looked at pupils' books both in and outside lessons and listened to some pupils reading.
- Inspectors met with groups of pupils, which included the most able and disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. They spoke with pupils and students in Aspen 2 as they worked. They met pupils informally during breaktimes.
- Discussions were held with staff, including senior and middle leaders, teachers and TAs in Aspen 2. A meeting was held with the chair of the trustees and governing body, and four other governors, three of whom were also trustees. A local authority representative met with the lead inspector.
- In addition to 28 written comments from parents, inspectors took account of a similar number of responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and 26 questionnaires completed by staff.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documents. These included the school's view of its performance, standards and progress information for the main school and Aspen 2, together with behaviour and attendance records and a range of policies.

Inspection team

Clare Gillies, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Alison Robb-Webb	Ofsted Inspector
Frederick Valletta	Ofsted Inspector
David Powell	Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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