

School inspection report

Date: 6 to 8 February 2024

Dover College

Effingham Crescent

Dover

CT17 9RH

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Summary of inspection findings

1. Governors and school leaders have a clear vision and a detailed understanding of the quality of the school's provision and areas for development.
2. Subject leaders plan the curriculum effectively so that pupils receive an engaging range of lessons and co-curricular activities that allow them to make progress and experience success. Pupils make good progress throughout the school, especially in the prep school and at GCSE. However, progress for pupils in the sixth form and for those who speak English as an additional language (EAL) is less consistent. Data analysis does not currently analyse attainment of the more able as a sub-group, and sometimes in lessons there is not appropriate challenge for this group of pupils. Assessment of pupils' work is generally helpful and detailed, supporting pupils' confidence in knowing how to make progress and improve their work.
3. Pupils who have educational needs and/or disability (SEND) are well supported through individual and group lessons as well as strategies in the classroom. Leaders' recent investment in staff and resources to meet pupils' individual needs has responded to increased demand in this area. Parents, staff and pupils express confidence that individual needs will be well met in a supportive and validating environment where everyone can achieve their personal best.
4. Relationships between pupils, and between pupils and staff, are positive. Pastoral care of pupils is attentive and informed, resulting in pupils feeling cared for and valued. There is a calm, friendly and purposeful working atmosphere. Teachers personalise and allocate resources according to need. The house system supports both camaraderie and healthy competition. Pupils are tolerant of and kind to each other and value the diversity within the school community. The personal development programmes promote considerate and responsible behaviour. Incidents of bullying are rare and swiftly dealt with.
5. Most areas of school life are reviewed and monitored, including by governors, and written records kept of actions needed. Leaders review behaviour, bullying and sanction logs to identify and address trends. However, this review is not consistently rigorous.
6. Behaviour is generally positive. There is a clear hierarchy of sanctions applied in a way that is usually fair and effective. Occasionally, low-level behaviour issues from a few pupils adversely affects the focus of others. However, staff know individual pupils well so that personalised interventions can be applied to manage this.
7. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education. Pupils in the early years and prep regularly visit the senior school; there is an effective induction programme, and recent investment in the careers department means that pupils at all levels, including in the Nursery, receive information about the world of work. Senior pupils receive balanced and helpful subject choice, careers and university advice and progress to a variety of destinations to study a wide range of subjects.
8. Pupils care for each other and many contribute to the community beyond the school through the provision of opportunities to take part in charity work, take part in off-site visits and participate in schemes such as the Duke of Edinburgh Award.
9. Pupils in the senior school take part in activities that develop their skills and their physical, aesthetic and cultural interests.

10. Boarders are well supervised and provided with a broad range of activities and study supervision to ensure their time is well spent. Their accommodation is generally comfortable. The age and layout of the buildings in some boarding houses presents challenges. There are plans in place to improve the boarding accommodation. However, leaders do not always proactively identify potential risks in relation to boarding accommodation and supervision.
11. Safeguarding arrangements are effective and reflect the requirements of current guidance. The designated safeguarding leaders ensure staff are well trained and there is effective liaison with external agencies when appropriate. Pupils are confident about how to report concerns if necessary, and where to seek help. Effective safeguarding risk assessments are in place, which are regularly reviewed, including by governors.

The extent to which the school meets the Standards

- Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance are met.
- Standards relating to the quality of education, training and recreation are met.
- Standards relating to pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing are met.
- Standards relating to pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society are met.
- Standards relating to safeguarding are met.

Recommended next steps

Leaders should:

- Review the monitoring of boarding to support both risk management and the comfort and maintenance of boarding accommodation
- expand the analysis of attainment data to include all sub-groups, including the more able, and to inform target setting so that improvements in attainment can be made and monitored
- review the impact of support for pupils with EAL in the senior school, including in lessons, so that all pupils in these groups can make similar levels of progress to their peers
- ensure there is a regular programme of lesson observation in the senior school to inform monitoring, development and the sharing of good practice, especially regarding the impact of low-level behaviour and provision for pupils identified as more able within their cohorts
- review the way behaviour, bullying and sanctions logs are created, viewed and monitored to ensure trends can be easily identified and appropriate actions taken to reduce incidents of low-level poor behaviour.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

12. Strategic planning identifies priorities and actions to develop areas across academic and boarding provision, co-curricular activities and the maintenance and development of the site. Recruitment decisions are made to provide further support and capacity to areas identified as needing development, for example in careers and digital learning. School priorities are arrived at through a process of discussion and collaboration with staff and pupils, refined using focus groups and coordinated by the relevant leaders.
13. School leaders actively promote pupils' wellbeing by ensuring staff are well trained. They provide a comprehensive programme to ensure staff are well informed about safeguarding, health and safety, the Prevent duty, online safety and first aid provision. Attendance at training is recorded, with new starters receiving mandatory training as part of an induction package. Leaders keep their own knowledge, skills and understanding up to date by attending training from external agencies and professional bodies.
14. In the Nursery and prep school, leaders know pupils and staff well. They support staff to achieve the best learning outcomes for the pupils by checking weekly planning, and by carrying out regular learning walks. Senior leaders undertake supervision of individual teachers every half term, where matters such as staff wellbeing and training are discussed.
15. Leaders provide the required information to parents using the school's website and other communications. This includes details of the complaints, safeguarding and behaviour policies. Parents receive regular written reports on their child's progress.
16. Leaders respond quickly to parental concerns, following the complaints policy which is appropriate. Complaints and concerns are regularly reviewed, including by governors, to identify trends and subsequently take action to address issues where necessary. There is an appropriate balance of proactive and reactive responses to issues: for example, a recent spate of vaping was addressed by identifying the use of vapes and applying sanctions. Staff also provided materials pointing out related health concerns and addressed the issue in assembly. As a result, pupils were made aware of the risks of vaping and likely sanctions.
17. The school is well organised and generally well maintained, with clear procedures in place to rectify identified issues, for example an area of damp in a boarding house. Risks are identified with plans to mitigate these, and actions taken when needed, for example with the addition of speed bumps within the school site to control the speed of traffic. Health and safety records are reviewed regularly to keep pupils and staff safe on site. Spending decisions by governors have allowed for the recent addition of ramps and the upgrading of lighting in some areas to further mitigate risks to pupils. However, leaders do not always proactively identify risks that might exist with boarding accommodation and supervision, such as potential access to an isolated corridor which was identified and dealt with during the inspection.
18. The governing body is well led and deployed, with defined committees: critical areas such as safeguarding are on the agenda of committees to provide an extra layer of assurance. Governors have recently approved further appointments to the senior leadership team to increase capacity and protect staff wellbeing as well as to mitigate against staff turnover.

19. Leaders are diligent in ensuring an ethos of inclusivity is at the forefront of their planning. This results in an environment where pupils feel valued and recognised. There is a detailed accessibility plan which includes consideration of pupils with a variety of needs.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to the quality of leadership, management, and governance

All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

20. Leaders plan the curriculum to ensure that pupils have many opportunities to gain knowledge and develop skills. Subject leaders devise schemes of work to map knowledge and skills, referencing literacy, relationships and sex education, careers education, moral, social, cultural understanding and spiritual development.
21. A topic-based curriculum in the prep school allows connections to be made across disciplines, for example in a project on the Tudors where activities include mapping skills, modelling a Tudor house and baking gingered bread, all of which increased pupils' understanding of how Tudor citizens lived, ate and travelled and how that differs from modern life. Such approaches are typical, and support pupils' connective thinking. Foreign languages are learned from the early years and are effective in starting to develop both children's linguistic proficiency and cultural appreciation.
22. Teachers have secure subject knowledge and plan lessons to successfully engage pupils. For example, by setting timetables to music, or relating a debate on the ethics of World War Two to a recent film. Teachers are enthusiastic about the subjects they teach as an academic discipline, and as a result pupils are well motivated. They make good progress, and this is enhanced by the wide availability of support from teachers beyond taught lessons.
23. Exam statistics on the website were corrected for transparency during the inspection. Leaders use data to monitor both the progress of pupils half termly and evaluate attainment at GCSE and A level. This analysis and use of data in the senior school is not consistently used to identify subjects or sub-groups that are underperforming. All but a very few pupils attain grades at GCSE that exceed those predicted from their starting points. Progress by pupils during their A-Level courses, and by some pupils who speak English as an additional language, is less marked and below the school's aims for these groups. The use of cognitive ability tests project likely attainment and from these the school sets aspirational targets, which most pupils find motivational.
24. Leaders reflect on underachievement in external examinations. For example, analysis of internal assessment results identified that pupils were weak at the retention and retrieval of information. As a result, leaders have changed approaches in lessons to emphasise the chunking of text and focused on revision techniques to support retrieval of knowledge.
25. Teachers provide consistently helpful feedback to pupils about their written work. Pupils make improvements because of specific advice, for example, where model answers are provided as a template or common class errors distributed for use in proofreading.
26. In the prep school, the "purple polish" technique allows pupils to learn from corrected errors and use drafting to improve their work. Teachers provide target sheets which help pupils recall and apply guidance from marked work. Pupils in the prep school have individual learning passports where pupils list their favourite learning strategies, and these are supported by parents. As a result, pupils are clear about how to make improvements and progress in their studies.
27. In the early years, leaders ensure that staff are suitably qualified and trained and have a detailed understanding of how children learn at this stage in their lives. Fortnightly curriculum planning meetings and individual learning profiles ensure that individual needs are met, and appropriate challenge provided across the ability range. Children learn within a stimulating environment and with well-chosen resources that supports their acquisition of social, creative, and physical skills.

Engaging tasks are delivered through a thematic approach; for example, a staff-led activity in the nursery saw pupils working on fine motor skills and numeracy by filling containers with dried rice and noodles whilst discussing China as part of the celebration of the Chinese New Year.

28. Pupils who have SEND are supported well. Informed referrals from teachers, diagnostic screening and effective communication with prior schools means pupils who have SEND are quickly identified. The individual needs departments in both prep and senior schools oversee the creation of individual education plans for pupils, and training is provided for teachers to apply appropriate support strategies in lessons. Classroom provision is supplemented by individual or group support sessions with a specialist teacher. As a result, pupils who have SEND gain confidence and make progress.
29. Pupils with EAL have specialist lessons and individualised programmes to help them access the curriculum as quickly as possible. However, some do not make the same progress as their peers and recently arrived pupils are sometimes not able to fully participate in lessons because of their level of fluency in English.
30. Leaders have identified that the needs of the more able pupils in lessons are not consistently reflected in teachers' planning or levels of academic challenge. Pupils identified as more able are sometimes challenged by strategies such as questioning techniques, by being grouped with other more able pupils which allows for high level discussion, or by being given more difficult tasks. However, these strategies are not consistently seen across lessons. Thus, at times the more able pupils are not set work that matches their ability.
31. An age-appropriate range of co-curricular opportunities at lunchtime and after school provides pupils with opportunities to develop skills for their future lives, make new friends and have fun.
32. Pupils in the prep school and children in the early years have access to plenty of outdoor space; younger pupils enjoy a wide range of activities that promote their fine and gross motor skills, such as "trikes", ballgames and potion making.
33. Pupils in the senior school have opportunities to take part in activities that develop enterprise, physical prowess and aesthetic and cultural interests.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to the quality of education, training and recreation are met

All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 3: Pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing

34. The pastoral structures and systems throughout the school mean that pastoral care of pupils is well informed, focused and attentive. As a result, pupils feel cared for and valued as members of an inclusive and understanding community.
35. Adults are aware of pupils' physical and emotional needs and act to actively promote wellbeing in these areas. The Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) and the Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) curriculum, the guidance provided by adults and pupils in assemblies, and the implementation of rewards and sanctions actively promote a framework in which pupils demonstrate mutual respect and can grow in self-esteem and confidence.
36. The resources used for the teaching of PSHE cover all necessary aspects of this area of the curriculum. However, when external packages are used, teachers do not consistently adjust them to meet the context of Dover College pupils. Leaders arrange a series of talks on PSHE related topics, supplemented by a programme of outside speakers. Leaders plan themed weeks to tie into national events such as digital awareness or mental health week. Pupils receive age appropriate and specialist advice. As a result, pupils' self-knowledge gradually develops as they move through the school.
37. The physical education timetable and co-curricular programmes provide a wide range of sporting and physical exercise opportunities. Pupils have a choice of sports options from Year 11. All senior pupils can play team sports. The decision to appoint specialist rugby coaches off-site has increased pupil expertise in this area. The refectory provides a wide variety of nutritious choices to promote pupils' physical health.
38. The religious studies curriculum, assemblies and weekly chapel for prep and senior pupils provide opportunity for spiritual and moral development and for pupils to reflect, sing and pray.
39. In the senior school, overall, behaviour is positive. However, there are occasional low-level issues such as fidgeting or inattention in lessons which impacts on the attention of other pupils. Teachers have received training in behaviour management and share ideas about how best to manage the behaviour of individuals pupils by considering case studies, including where neurodiversity impacts on pupils' behaviour. A hierarchy of rewards and sanctions gives teachers a framework to manage any poor behaviour and is seen by pupils as applied fairly and motivational. However, teachers do not systematically record low-level behaviour incidents or other concerns in lessons or within the boarding houses. Therefore, leaders do not have full information to spot trends and take necessary action to improve behaviour for pupils.
40. In the prep school, the example set by staff nurtures good manners. A positive behaviour management framework of ticks and stars rewards encourages good positive behaviour. Leaders keep an incident book which is reviewed, and outcomes recorded.
41. There are relatively few incidences of bullying: pupils and parents are generally confident that any bullying is dealt with swiftly.

42. Leaders diligently oversee matters of admission and attendance and are working to improve attendance rates. Leaders take an informed approach in challenging absence especially for international pupils at the start and end of terms. Appropriate liaison with the local authority is in place when pupils join or leave the school.
43. Premises and accommodation are generally maintained well. There is an ongoing programme of investment and maintenance, including to address some issues related to the age of some of the buildings on the ancient site.
44. Health and safety procedures are comprehensive. An online record of accidents is meticulously kept and monitored, including by the compliance and risk governance committee. Fire drills happen at least termly including one at night; there has also been a recent lockdown drill. Training for staff in fire and health and safety areas is regular and well recorded. Pupils feel secure on site, and during the inspection the lighting in some areas was upgraded further. During inspection of the boarding accommodation, some issues were noted regarding both window restraints and access to a secluded area. These were rectified before the inspection concluded.
45. Pupils are well supervised, with twice daily registrations and emails used to alert staff if a pupil is unexpectedly missing from a lesson.
46. Governors have resourced a well-equipped medical centre for pupils' medical needs. Pupils are well cared for if unwell. All staff in the prep school are paediatric first-aid trained. Boarders have access to the school medical centre and local doctors. All pupils in the senior school, including boarders, have access to a school counsellor and two independent listeners.
47. The accessibility and approachability of boarding staff means boarders feel supported within their boarding houses. The boarding houses are generally welcoming spaces, with good quality sleeping and living accommodation. Boarders' possessions are well looked after. Boarders have access to food and drink, within the school site and boarding houses. There is a sense of positive momentum in the boarding team with investment into staff, resources and infrastructure, and a boarding development plan to underpin this.
48. The prefect system provides pupils with opportunities to develop leadership skills and support their peers, including in the boarding houses and prep school, where pupils assume a variety of roles from digital leaders to subject ambassadors.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing

All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 4: Pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society

49. School leaders have planned a curriculum which provides opportunities to prepare pupils for life in modern Britain and to learn about the wider world. Programmes of study are mapped to themes such as spiritual, moral, social and cultural education (SMSC) and British values, and a curriculum audit has identified opportunities for careers education.
50. Teachers choose texts, for example 'An Inspector Calls', to give opportunities to discuss civic responsibility and the links between individual behaviour and society. Pupils consider issues of sustainability in science and geography. As a result, pupils can place their subject knowledge within a wider context, see its relevance to their current and future lives and consider their own duties and responsibilities.
51. The sixth form "Laborem" programme includes topics such as money management and research skills which prepare pupils for their future opportunities and responsibilities. Many sixth formers choose to take the optional extended project which teaches time management and research skills.
52. The RSE and PSHE programmes include role play and other resources to address hypothetical friendship and equality issues. Staff take opportunities to celebrate the cultural diversity that exists in the school.
53. The school rules, jointly devised by pupils and staff, emphasise the difference between right and wrong and help pupils to understand the need for rules and laws. The student council encourages pupil participation and the formal expression of opinions. Boarders have their own committee and learn to become advocates on behalf of their peers. In the prep school, pupils' ideas have contributed to the refurbishment of the library and play area. There are many opportunities for pupils to act as mentors.
54. Leaders have expanded the careers programme to provide regular one to one guidance to pupils in the senior school. A busy programme of activities is mapped against national benchmarks. Younger pupils explore different jobs through role play and visits, for example, from a carpenter and paramedic. All curriculum areas display posters about job opportunities linked to their discipline. Pupils speak appreciatively of the support they receive as they apply to higher education or employment, including those applying to study overseas. Talks to pupils and parents at transition points help pupils to make informed and balanced decisions about their futures.
55. Leaders encourage pupil enterprise including through the opportunities for prep and senior pupils to take part in national competitions, where they achieve consistent success.
56. Many pupils are given the opportunity to contribute to the local community; for example, through outreach work at a special school, and pupils of all ages organise activities to raise funds for charity.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society

All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

57. Leaders ensure that arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils. They achieve this by undertaking frequent and detailed oversight of records, the implementation of procedures, liaison with external agencies when appropriate, and discussions with staff and pupils.
58. Policies are detailed and reflect the most recent guidance. Referrals to external agencies are made in a timely manner, when concerns arise. Staff have a reliable understanding of potential types of abuse. They record concerns accurately. Safeguarding leaders act quickly when issues arise and, with other senior leaders, carry out a weekly review to identify themes or trends.
59. Leaders arrange regular training for all adults working with pupils. The content is suitably tailored to roles; for example, governors focus on strategic aspects, catering staff on healthy eating and minibuses on pupils' interrelationships on journeys. Staff are knowledgeable about child protection procedures, including those for online safety and the risks posed by radicalisation and extremism. Training is up to date and in line with local requirements. All boarding house parents are trained to the same level as safeguarding leaders. The school provides safeguarding training for prefects.
60. Pupils feel safe at school. When pupils have concerns about any aspect of safeguarding, they are confident with systems for reporting which enable named or anonymous concerns to be reported, for example through 'worry boxes' and online alerts. Boarders feel safe in boarding houses and boarding time.
61. Pupils with specific vulnerabilities are kept safe by the provision of specialist training; for example, in the use of epipens or ventilators. Leaders have considered potential additional risks associated with boarding and the early years and have put suitable controls in place.
62. Leaders have recently introduced an updated filtering tool which helps to keep pupils safe whilst they are online. Usage is monitored and if a problem is identified, action is taken to protect pupils. Younger boarders hand in their phones to staff at the end of each evening to prevent overuse of social media and to aid sleep.
63. Safer recruitment checks are completed for governors, staff and volunteers and an accurate record of appointments is kept. Leaders and other staff with responsibility in this area are fully aware of and fulfil their duties in line with current legislation.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

All the relevant Standards are met.

School details

School	Dover College
Department for Education number	886/6003
Registered charity number	307856
Address	Dover College Effingham Crescent Dover Kent CT17 9RH
Phone number	01304 205969
Email address	headmaster@dovercollege.org.uk
Website	www.dovercollege.org.uk
Proprietor	Corporation of Dover
Chair	Dr Claire Scholfield-Myers
Headteacher	Mr Simon Fisher
Age range	3 to18
Number of pupils	318
Number of boarding pupils	93
Date of previous inspection	28 to 30 January 2020

Information about the school

64. Dover College is an independent, coeducational day and boarding school for children aged 3–18 years. Founded in 1871, the school sits in the grounds of what was a 12th century Benedictine Priory in the centre of Dover. Since the previous inspection both a new headteacher and a new chair of governors have been appointed.
65. There are 93 boarders who are accommodated in four single-sex boarding houses, with 20 different nationalities represented.
66. There are 68 pupils in the prep school, of whom 11 are in the Nursery.
67. The school has identified 126 pupils, 31 in the prep school and 95 in the senior school, as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. A very small minority of pupils have an education and health care plan.
68. English is an additional language for 86 pupils, 74 of whom receive specialist support for their English.
69. The school states its aims are to be a place where confidence is nurtured, inquisitiveness is encouraged, individuality is celebrated, and creative learning is supported, thus empowering pupils to achieve the very best of their ability within a friendly supportive and diverse community. The school encourages the philosophy of the Round Square organisation, namely adventure, democracy, environmentalism, internationalism, leadership and service.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

4 to 6 February 2024

70. A team of five inspectors visited the school for two and a half days. The onsite inspection was quality assured by a monitor. A shadow team inspector accompanied the team.

71. Inspection activities included:

- observation of lessons, some in conjunction with school leaders
- observation of registration periods and assemblies
- observation of a sample of extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection
- discussions with the chair and other governors
- discussions with the headteacher, school leaders, managers and other members of staff
- discussions with pupils
- visits to the learning support area and facilities for physical education, including an off-site facility
- visits to boarding houses accompanied by pupils and staff
- scrutiny of samples of pupils' work
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

72. The inspection team considered the views of pupils, members of staff and parents who responded to ISI's pre-inspection surveys.

How are association independent schools in England inspected?

- The Department for Education is the regulator for independent schools in England.
- ISI is approved by the Secretary of State for Education to inspect independent schools in England, which are members of associations in membership of the Independent Schools Council.
- ISI inspections report to the Department for Education on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards, the EYFS statutory framework requirements, the National Minimum Standards for boarding schools and any other relevant standards are met.
- For more information, please visit **www.isi.net**.

Independent Schools Inspectorate

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For more information, please visit isi.net