

Astor College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118807
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	379687
Inspection dates	18–19 October 2011
Reporting inspector	Paul Metcalf

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

Type of school	Modern (non-selective)
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1018
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	172
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John Peall
Headteacher	Chris Russell
Date of previous school inspection	28–29 January 2009
School address	Astor Avenue Dover CT17 0AS
Telephone number	01304 201151
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by five additional inspectors. They observed 31 lessons and 31 teachers. They talked to staff and looked at a range of data and documentation, including college policies, development plans, assessment data, safeguarding documentation and the minutes of governing body meetings. The responses to questionnaires completed by staff, students and 95 parents and carers were also analysed.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the college's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- The extent to which lesson observations, work scrutiny and available data support judgments about attainment and, in particular, progress across the whole college.
- Whether the quality of teaching is securing sufficient progress and learning for all groups of students, including boys, girls, those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, and those who speak English as an additional language.
- How well the care, guidance and support provided by the college encourage regular attendance, foster good behavior and promote learning and personal development for all students.

Information about the school

The college is a larger-than-average, non-selective school in a selective area. Students are predominantly of White British heritage but with an increasing number of students coming from eastern European countries. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is well above national average, although the proportion with statements of special educational needs is well below it. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free schools meals and the proportion of students who speak English as an additional language are broadly average. The college is in a hard federation with three other schools in the area which cater for pupils of primary age. The federation has a chief executive and a single governing body. A head of college is responsible for the day-to-day running of the college which is designated as a Specialist Arts College. The college has a military cadre and a number of awards including an Artsmark Gold and an International School Award. It is also an Investor in People organisation.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Astor College is a good school with a good sixth form. The college has worked decisively and purposefully since the last inspection and many features of the college's work are now outstanding. In particular, the attention paid to the care, guidance and well-being of its students and the strong links forged with the community are outstanding. The use of the specialism in the arts to develop students' emotional intelligence, provide a bridge to the local community and enhance the spiritual and cultural appreciation of students is excellent.

The college has worked resolutely to raise attainment in English and mathematics so that the demanding targets of the National Challenge programme have been met and exceeded. Attainment is now broadly average as a result of improved teaching, better use of data and the greater familiarity with examination requirements. Progress is good for most students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and the growing population of students who speak English as an additional language. There is little difference in the progress made by girls and boys.

Students feel safe and have very positive attitudes towards learning and healthy lifestyles. They are polite, friendly and behave well. Their attendance is no more than average, but effective strategies are beginning to substantially improve it and cut the proportion of persistent absentees. Students' successes are celebrated through displays of work across the college, recognised in the Artsmark Gold award and further validated through local art exhibitions and the prestigious National Students' Art Exhibition.

Leaders and managers, in partnership with the governing body, have an excellent understanding of the college's strengths and areas for further improvement. Self-evaluation is accurate and detailed. While leaders accurately judge the overall quality of teaching to be good, they acknowledge that there still remains some inconsistent practice across and, sometimes, within subjects. There is a clear track record of improvement since the last inspection which reported that the college provided students with no more than a satisfactory education. Actions taken to improve English and mathematics, evaluate teaching and learning, and involve students in their learning have been successful. The college's capacity to sustain further improvements is good.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching across the college by ensuring that:
 - best practice in teaching is securely embedded in all departments and supported by professional development
 - lesson planning takes greater account of the spread of ability in individual classes
 - all students are engaged in creative and active learning, making use of the college's arts specialism
 - students are encouraged to develop their independent and collaborative learning skills.

- Continue to improve attendance by working closely with students and their families to raise levels of attendance to above national averages and reduce the proportion of students who are persistently absent from college to at least the national average level.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Students' attainment is improving and is now broadly average. Students join the college with attainment that is below average so that the progress of individual students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, is now good. Students' achievement overall is good. The proportion of students gaining five or more A* to C grades at GCSE including English and mathematics has risen from significantly below national averages in 2009 to broadly average in 2011. The college's detailed tracking data show that present Year 11 students are in line to achieve even better results.

Students concentrate very well in lessons, listen to each other and are used to reflecting on what they are learning and how well they are doing. In an outstanding Year 11 mathematics lesson, students identified their own strengths and areas for improvement from a recently completed examination paper. They collaborated productively and confidently, sharing ideas and supporting each other. Their conversations revealed an excellent understanding of examination requirements and what they had to do to improve.

Students are respectful to their peers and communicate well with adults. Behaviour is good both around the college and in lessons. Previously high exclusion rates are now falling as a consequence of the inclusion centre, which works hard with challenging students to support them back into the classroom. Students know how to keep themselves safe and say that there is always someone available to talk to should the need arise. They understand exactly what constitutes a healthy lifestyle and older students perform well as ambassadors talking about health-related issues in local primary schools.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

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Students have a good awareness of their career options and are well prepared for further education, training and work. They have an excellent understanding of moral and social issues through the well-devised programme of personal, social and health education. Their spiritual and cultural development is very well supported through the arts. Students’ extensive engagement with music and performance, locally, nationally and internationally in Europe and America, is recognised by the International School Award.

These are the grades for pupils’ outcomes

Pupils’ achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils’ attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils’ learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils’ behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils’ attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

The quality of teaching and teachers’ engagement with students and their learning are good. The best teaching displays high expectations, strong relationships, secure subject knowledge and a good awareness of examination requirements. In the outstanding lessons observed, students were fully engaged in their learning. For example, in a Year 12 general studies lesson on moral dilemmas, the teacher skilfully used a question-and-answer session to explore and challenge students’ understanding of moral issues which made them think and question their own thinking. The work proceeded beyond the lesson when a small group of students were observed working together to agree a format for a presentation and deciding what roles each of them should take. Sometimes teachers’ planning does not take sufficient account of the spread of ability in classes and in a small minority of lessons students do not have enough opportunities to develop their independent and

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

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collaborative learning skills because teachers talk for too long.

Assessment is good and students have a clear idea of their target grades and what they must do to achieve their targets. Data are used effectively to track the progress of individual students and support any who are underperforming. Marking in books is regular and helpful. Some target grades have not been adjusted to take account of students’ present attainment.

The curriculum is broad and considerably enhanced by the extensive opportunities for enrichment, including the military cadre offered in conjunction with a local military school. Specialist arts status has had a positive impact, but creativity has not yet extended to the whole curriculum and to subjects like mathematics and science. Literacy is strongly supported through all subjects but numeracy and information and communication technology less so.

The outstanding care, guidance and support provided contribute significantly to students’ confidence, self-esteem and good behaviour. Students are known and valued as individuals. The quality and accessibility of information, advice and guidance, including careers advice, are good. Transition arrangements are excellent as a result of the strong links with partner primary schools and the comprehensive programme of preparation for higher education. Well-coordinated interventions and established partnerships with external agencies provide very effective additional support for the most vulnerable students.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils’ needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

Leaders and managers are highly regarded by students, staff, parents and carers. The chief executive and the head of college, supported by other senior leaders from the federation, have been outstandingly successful in instilling a compelling sense of purpose, direction and passion. There is a strong commitment to improvement, recognised through Investor in People status, with detailed development planning and accurate self-evaluation.

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Governance is outstanding; members of the governing body have an excellent understanding of the college’s work and priorities. They are active in shaping the direction of the college and fully understand their roles in providing challenge and support. They are highly effective in promoting improvement and they discharge all their statutory duties effectively, including health and safety and safeguarding. Safeguarding procedures are very thorough and robust, with exemplary attention given to the safe recruitment of staff and child protection issues.

The college enjoys good relationships with parents and carers. Consultation is regular and well organised to ensure that parents' and carers' views are known, for example through the use of parental questionnaires on communication. The college is highly inclusive and embraces diversity. It promotes equality of opportunity, tackles discrimination very effectively and works well with a wide range of partners.

The college offers excellent links to local schools as well as regular visits, exhibitions and performances abroad so that students have a strong awareness of different communities, a wide appreciation of diversity and culture, and are well prepared for life in a multicultural world. The college is active in promoting community cohesion but it has yet to evaluate the impact of its outreach work.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	1
The effectiveness of the school’s engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Sixth form

Attainment in the sixth form is in line with national averages although better for A-level than AS courses. Attainment on entry to the sixth form is below that seen nationally so that students’ progress is good. Retention rates are improving and the

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number of students enrolled is increasing. Students’ personal development and well-being are good, with particular strengths resulting from the many leadership and management opportunities within and outside of college. Additionally, students’ contributions to supporting younger students and charities are a particular strength.

Teaching and learning are good. Lessons are well planned and taught by staff with secure subject knowledge. Students enjoy their lessons and value the positive relationships with their teachers. They receive regular feedback on their progress with constructive comments on how to improve. The curriculum is under constant review with the recent introduction of A level equivalent courses in French and music in response to student requests. The curriculum is broad, balanced and responsive. Time management and other key skills are offered through the general studies course and form-tutor sessions. Care and guidance are strong and students benefit from high levels of personal and academic support.

The leadership and management of the sixth form are good. Sixth form leaders have a clear understanding of its strengths and weaknesses which are articulated through the sixth form development plan. Effective engagement with parents and carers and with the community makes a good contribution to the progress of students, particularly those following arts-based courses.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account:	2
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

Views of parents and carers

A relatively small number of parents and carers returned questionnaires given the size of the college. Of those that did, most were highly supportive of the college and the quality of education it provides. A very large majority agree that their child is safe, enjoys college and makes enough progress. Parents and carers are well informed about their child's progress and confirm their confidence in the leadership and management of the college. A number made extremely positive comments, particularly with regard to the college’s arrangements for transition from primary school and the opportunities which the arts specialism offered. A very small minority of responses raised concerns about behaviour, but inspectors found that behaviour in classes and around college was good and the college’s procedures for following up any instances of poor behaviour are clear, unambiguous and consistently applied.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Astor College to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 95 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1018 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	34	36	51	54	7	7	2	1
The school keeps my child safe	33	35	51	54	6	6	3	2
The school informs me about my child’s progress	40	42	46	48	4	4	4	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	31	33	47	49	7	7	6	4
The teaching is good at this school	27	28	52	55	6	6	4	6
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	26	27	50	53	13	14	3	3
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	18	19	56	59	13	14	5	3
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	26	27	54	57	8	8	3	4
The school meets my child’s particular needs	26	27	52	55	9	9	4	4
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	28	29	46	48	11	12	6	4
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	19	20	51	54	12	13	6	7
The school is led and managed effectively	27	28	52	55	7	7	5	4
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	34	36	47	49	7	7	5	2

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 08 April 2011 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.

20 October 2011

Dear Students



Inspection of Astor College, Dover, CT17 0AS

On behalf of the inspectors who visited your school recently, I am writing to say how much we enjoyed meeting and talking to you in your lessons and around the college. Thank you for making us feel welcome and telling us about your college as well as answering the questionnaires. We particularly enjoyed the wealth of art around the college and were pleased to hear of your national and international successes in art, drama and music.

We noted your positive responses in the questionnaires confirming that you enjoy college, feel safe and learn a lot in lessons. We were pleased to hear that you know how well you are doing at college and that you are told how to improve. We have taken your views and those of your parents and carers and college staff into account in arriving at our judgement that your college, including the sixth form, is good. Some aspects of the college's work are outstanding.

Examination results are improving and you are making good progress in your academic and personal development. The quality of teaching and learning is good and the curriculum is tailored to meet your needs. Care, guidance and support are outstanding. Leadership and management are outstanding and your involvement with the community is an excellent example to us all.

We have asked your teachers to improve the quality of teaching and ensure that they increase the proportion of outstanding teaching across the college.

We have suggested that lesson planning takes greater account of the spread of ability in classes and more use is made of creative and active learning in subjects such as mathematics and science. We have also asked the college to continue to improve attendance and hope that you will continue to attend college regularly and take advantage of the education on offer.

Once again, thank you for your contribution to the inspection and very best wishes for your future success and happiness.

Yours sincerely

Paul Metcalf
Lead inspector

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