



# Astor College for the Arts

## Inspection Report

**Unique Reference Number** 118807  
**LEA** Kent  
**Inspection number** 280397  
**Inspection dates** 26 January 2006 to 27 January 2006  
**Reporting inspector** Helen Hutchings AI

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Modern (non-selective)	<b>School address</b>	Astor Avenue
<b>School category</b>	Community		Dover
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11 to 19		Kent CT17 0AS
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed	<b>Telephone number</b>	01304 201151
<b>Number on roll</b>	1354	<b>Fax number</b>	01304 200152
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body	<b>Chair of governors</b>	Mr John Peel
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	28 February 2000	<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Chris Russell

<b>Age group</b> 11 to 19	<b>Inspection dates</b> 26 January 2006 - 27 January 2006	<b>Inspection number</b> 280397
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## **Introduction**

The inspection was carried out by five Additional Inspectors.

## **Description of the school**

The school is a mixed, non-selective school serving its local community in Dover, an area with high levels of social deprivation. Many of the more able pupils in the area attend grammar schools. This means that the overall attainment of pupils on entry to the school is below national averages. Of the 1,327 pupils in the school, 184 are in the sixth form. The school has been designated as a specialist school for the visual arts. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds, but several ethnic groups are represented in small numbers, including a few who join the school as refugees or migrants from Eastern Europe. The percentage of pupils who have special educational needs is in line with the national average and the majority have social, emotional or behavioural or moderate learning difficulties. The proportion known to be eligible for free school meals is also in line with the national average in the main school but higher for students in the sixth form. A small number of pupils speak English as an additional language and a few pupils are in care.

## **Key for inspection grades**

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

## **Overall effectiveness of the school**

### **Grade: 2**

Astor College for the Arts is a good school and provides good value for money. Strong leadership and good management have successfully ensured that educational provision is good. Students' abilities are encouraged and they reach above average standards in a range of art and design courses, successfully reflecting the college's specialism for the visual arts.

Students achieve well from their starting points. They enter the college with standards well below national averages and increase these progressively so that by the time they reach GCSE, students' attainment is closer to the national average, and in some subjects above average. This is because of the good teaching the students receive, though they would benefit from knowing more about the intentions of lessons and from better marking of their work, so that they know what they should do to improve.

The students' personal development is good and good levels of care and guidance are provided for their wide-ranging needs. Students' views are sought regularly. They say that they enjoy the college and find lessons interesting and sometimes fun, so they work hard. The broad curriculum is enhanced by an extensive range of extra-curricular activities. Most parents are supportive and appreciative of all that the college provides.

Leaders and managers understand the college's strengths and weaknesses very well. Their view of the college's performance is in line with the inspectors' views. They have successfully implemented strategies to remedy weaknesses in performance that were identified in the past. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. The college is well placed to improve standards further.

## **Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form**

### **Grade: 3**

Inspectors agree that the college provides a satisfactory quality of education for its sixth form. The college takes the very principled approach of giving many students, who might otherwise have left full-time education, the opportunity to pursue sixth form courses. This successfully meets students' needs, so that on leaving the college, many have decided to pursue full-time further education programmes. Standards are lower than national averages but represent satisfactory achievement in relation to students' starting points. In the context of a relatively narrow range of vocational courses, some students have been restricted in what they could achieve. College leadership is focused well on raising aspirations. Leadership and management are satisfactory and recent evaluation has led to new appointments and a more rigorous approach to raising achievement. Students themselves recognise the significance of these changes, such as formalising study arrangements, and welcome them. Good teaching means that students are now making good progress in lessons. Students' personal development and the care they receive are strengths. Students become mature and confident individuals. They take full advantage of the many opportunities offered, for example, organising formal college occasions and their own prefect system. They speak highly of the guidance and support they receive from all staff.

## **What the school should do to improve further**

- help students to focus more on what they have learned and what they need to do to improve their work, by ensuring a more consistent approach to teaching and marking
- improve the balance of the curriculum for the sixth form to provide a better match of courses to the needs and capabilities of the students.

## **Achievement and standards**

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 3**

Students make good progress throughout the main school. Although overall standards remain below average, given their well below average standards when they enter the college in Year 7, the students' good achievement means that they gradually move closer to national averages by GCSE. This is because students are taught well and have positive attitudes. Performance is relatively consistent across all subjects and when variations are identified in any one year they are addressed quickly. The college sets challenging targets for achievement and successfully achieves them. Students who have special educational needs do not make as much progress as others, partly because of the low attendance rate of some, combined with the serious emotional difficulties of many students within this group.

Students embarking on A-level courses have lower entrance requirements than are commonly expected in other colleges. Many find their courses challenging, but they achieve satisfactorily and develop the confidence to continue in full-time education after they leave the college. Their final grades are below national averages, apart from art which has above average results. Students following vocational courses have entry levels more typical of students nationally and achieve results in line with the national averages for these programmes.

## **Personal development and well-being**

**Grade: 2**

Learners are happy in the college and their overall personal development is good. Behaviour in lessons and around the college is good and the college has effective systems to promote considerate behaviour. Some parents express concerns about bullying. Students say that any such incidents are dealt with quickly and fairly. The college's zero tolerance towards unacceptable behaviour results in a high rate of exclusions, reflecting a small minority who are disruptive and display challenging behaviour. There are good counselling procedures in place to support their return to full-time education.

The college has tried hard to reduce absence, including working closely with parents to promote better attendance. This is now beginning to reduce rates of absence, bringing attendance closer to the national average.

Students willingly take on responsibility and older students play a significant role in supporting and mentoring younger students. Students participate as members of the

college council. Their views are listened to and acted upon, in particular regarding the recent refurbishment of the toilets.

Students' spiritual, moral and social development is good. The wide range of extra-curricular activities on offer is well supported by students and this helps them to work collaboratively in teams, contributing positively to their social development and understanding of living within a community. Students comment enthusiastically about the fund raising activities for local and national charities. The international dimension is an outstanding element of college life. Cultural links abroad provide students with rich opportunities to develop and exhibit their art and engage in music-making abroad. Regular musical and drama productions are also a unique feature of the college, contributing very positively to students' cultural development.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 2**

Teaching and learning are good, and are reflected in students' good progress. Teachers are particularly successful in engaging students' interest and harnessing their enthusiasm. Even students who voice criticism about aspects of college life are complimentary about their teachers, and younger students, in particular, describe their lessons as fun. The good relationships that most teachers have with their students and the effective use of interactive whiteboards both contribute to the creation of an environment where students want to learn.

Behaviour management is a notable strength of teaching. Although there are some students with a history of poor behaviour, teachers are careful to ensure that the misbehaviour or sullen non-compliance of a few students are not allowed to disrupt the learning of others.

Most teachers begin lessons by explaining to students what they are expected to learn and end with a whole-class evaluation of what has been achieved. This effectively helps students to consolidate what they have been learning and teachers to assess students' understanding. However, in a few lessons these school expectations are not used as effectively as in others. Most marking gives students good guidance on what they need to do to improve their work, but some does little more than acknowledge that work has been done and opportunities are missed to reinforce literacy and the importance of good presentation.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

#### **Grade: 2**

#### **Grade for sixth form: 3**

The college's specialist arts status is reflected well in the extended range of creative arts courses offered throughout the year groups. These supplement a broad range of other subjects and option choices at GCSE, including vocational courses, so that the

curriculum from Years 7 to 11 is good. An alternative work-related curriculum is offered to those students in Years 10 and 11 who might not benefit from more academic courses. The comprehensive personal, social and health education programme has the advantage of being taught by specialist teachers. The extensive range of extra-curricular activities, and not just in the arts, further enrich the curriculum, as do the many opportunities offered to students to travel abroad with the college.

Though the curriculum in the sixth form is satisfactory, it does not offer as wide a choice of vocational courses as it could to reflect students' prior levels of attainment. Whilst many students choosing to follow AS and A2 level courses find them difficult and achieve final results below national averages, they mature and raise their aspirations during their time in the sixth form and gain the entry qualifications required for their chosen pathways after they leave the college.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 2**

The college takes good care of students and teachers know them well. Parents are well informed about their child's progress with regular meetings at academic review days. These meetings are valued by parents. Good attention is paid to health and safety issues, including regular risk assessments. The procedures for child protection are well established, with clear procedures in place.

Students receive good support on a range of issues, as part of the personal, social and health education programme, which is appreciated and valued by them. They are given good advice about careers and choice of courses for the next stage. Links with feeder primary schools are effective, promoting a smooth transition. The school has many students who have high levels of need and all students who are at risk are identified at an early stage. There is a good emphasis on students adopting healthy lifestyles and on issues concerning substance abuse, and students are aware of the associated dangers. The recent changes in catering facilities help to encourage students to eat sensibly.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

#### **Grade for sixth form: 3**

Leadership and management are good. The principal's very clear leadership ensures a strong focus on the creative aspects of learning and that all students are cared for and guided well. One of the most striking features about the college is its rich display, celebrating students' artwork and an example of how the college skilfully uses its specialist status to support cultural awareness. The strong team of senior staff work well together and are a real strength of the college's capacity for ongoing improvements.

The college has good structures to monitor and evaluate its work, and has recognised that these would be further improved by ensuring greater rigour and consistency in

the monitoring of teaching and learning. The college has demonstrated the ability to make changes when existing procedures are not fully effective, including recent major changes designed to bring about improvements in the sixth form and more focused monitoring of students' progress and teaching and learning.

Staffing shortages in the local area have been tackled effectively through links and joint training programmes in conjunction with a local teacher training college. Very effective resource management has enabled the college to make a considerable investment in information technology, which is already improving the students' learning.

Governors support the college very well, have a sound awareness of its strengths and weaknesses and provide good challenge for developments, especially in financial matters, but have failed to ensure that the college complies fully with the requirements for collective worship.



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## Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	<b>School Overall</b>	<b>16-19</b>
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### Overall effectiveness

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	2	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	Yes
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

### Achievement and standards

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	2	3
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	

### Personal development and well-being

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The behaviour of learners	3	
The attendance of learners	3	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	

### The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?</b>	2	2
<b>How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?</b>	2	3
<b>How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?</b>	2	2

<sup>1</sup> Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

**Leadership and management**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	2	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	2	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3	
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	Yes

<b>The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy</b>	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
<b>The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe</b>	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
<b>The extent to which learners make a positive contribution</b>	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
<b>The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being</b>	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

## **Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

You know that we have been inspecting the college to see what it does well and suggest ways in which it should improve. Before I tell you about that, I would like to thank you for the friendly way in which you welcomed the inspection team and talked to us about the college.

We were very pleased with most of the things we saw and agree with you that the college gives you good opportunities to learn and develop.

Here are a few of the things we found:

- Many of you told us that you enjoy being in the college and you showed this to us by the way you work hard in lessons
- This hard work pays off well and you make good progress towards your examinations and achieve the best results you can
- The college council is a good way for you to let staff know your thoughts and many of your ideas for improvements are taken forward
- The college is a friendly place and most of you get on well together, although some of you do not attend as well as you should
- Many of you take part in the very wide range of clubs and activities and this helps you develop interests and skills for the future. Some of you are even lucky enough to go abroad to perform musicals or present art exhibitions
- The principal, leadership team and staff work hard to make sure that you are taught well, taken care of and given good advice about your courses.

There are a couple of things that we think would make the college better:

- We have asked teachers to make sure that you are clear at the beginning of the lesson about what you are going to learn and, when they mark your work, to tell you exactly what you have to do to improve and reach the next level
- We would like to see a wider range of vocational courses in the sixth form so that you can follow the most appropriate courses to equip you well for the future.