

# Astor College for the Arts

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	118807
<b>Local Authority</b>	Kent
<b>Inspection number</b>	326899
<b>Inspection dates</b>	28–29 January 2009
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Joan Greenfield

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Modern (non-selective)
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School (total)	1186
Sixth form	141
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	John Peel
<b>Headteacher</b>	Carol Donovan
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	1 January 2006
<b>School address</b>	Astor Avenue Dover CT17 0AS
<b>Telephone number</b>	01304 200106
<b>Fax number</b>	01304 225170

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<b>Age group</b>	11–19
<b>Inspection dates</b>	28–29 January 2009
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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by five Additional Inspectors.

### Description of the school

The college is larger than most secondary schools, and is a non-selective school in a selective area. It has been a specialist college for the visual arts since 2002. Most students are of White British origin and the remainder come from a range of other backgrounds, the largest number coming from Eastern European countries. Very few students are at an early stage of learning English as an additional language. More students than usual join or leave the college at other than the normal transfer times. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is larger than average, and more than a half of these students have considerable behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. The proportion of students eligible for free schools meals is broadly average.

The college is in a formal federation with three other schools in the area catering for pupils of primary age. The federation has a chief executive and a single governing body. The college is run on a day-to-day basis by a head of school. The federation is part of the Dover Extended Services Forum which gained Quality in Extended Services (QES) emerged status in 2008. The college is also part of a post-16 consortium with other secondary schools in the area and a college of further education. It has also gained numerous quality marks and awards from national bodies.

### Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 3

The college provides students with a satisfactory education. Some elements of its work are good, for example students' personal development and well-being and the effective care, guidance and support they receive from staff. The college's partnerships with the other schools in the federation, as well as with a wide range of external agencies, services and local businesses, are excellent. Of particular note is the strong impact of the college's visual arts specialism on enhancing the college environment through a multitude of eye-catching displays of students' work. In other areas, the college's work is not quite as effective, although never less than satisfactory. Students, however, are positive about the college, with one commenting that it is 'a really good learning environment'.

Students' achievement is satisfactory in the main college and in the sixth form, although standards are below average by Year 11 and Year 13. This is reflected in the college's examination results, which have been below average in recent years but are improving. The results at five or more A\* to C grades including English and mathematics were better in 2008 than in 2007 and there was a substantial increase in the results at five or more A\* to G grades. Most groups of students performed as expected in 2008, but many of the higher attaining students, especially boys, did not reach their predicted grades. Although students did better than expected in mathematics than in 2007, the converse was true in English. In both subjects, many students are capable of doing better than they currently do. Students, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, make satisfactory progress from Year 7 to Year 11. The additional study sessions for targeted students, together with more frequent assessment and tracking of progress, are accelerating the rate of progress of some students.

The quality of teaching is satisfactory, with many examples of good and sometimes outstanding teaching, especially in the visual arts. In too many lessons, however, teachers do not involve students actively enough in lessons or ensure that the work is sufficiently demanding, especially for the more able students, to enable them to make consistently good progress. The curriculum overall is satisfactory and provides students with an appropriate range of academic and vocational courses. It is enriched by a good variety of extra-curricular activities, visits and other opportunities, many of which are linked to the college's specialist subjects.

Most students clearly enjoy college, and relationships between students and their teachers are good. Students have a good understanding of the need to lead safe and healthy lives, make an effective contribution to the college and wider community and are developing a range of skills that prepare them well for their future lives. Behaviour is mostly good in lessons but more variable around the college as not all students conform to the college's uncompromising expectations. This leads to high levels of fixed period exclusions. From the relatively small number of responses to the parents' questionnaire, many parents express considerable concerns about bullying and standards of behaviour in the college.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. There are strengths in the principled and thoughtful leadership of senior managers and their successful endeavours to create a team spirit and a positive ethos for learning within the college. Actions taken by the federation's leadership have had a positive impact on raising standards in its schools that will ultimately benefit the college. A number of systems and procedures are in place to check the college's work, with considerable responsibility devolved to middle leaders. However, these are insufficiently robust to enable senior leaders and governors to maintain a clear enough overview

of the impact of their actions, especially on teaching and learning and students' progress, to inform the judgements they make about the college's effectiveness, which are currently too generous. However, as there are some clear strengths in leadership and management within the federation and senior leaders have been successful in enhancing many aspects of the college's work, the capacity to improve further is good.

## **Effectiveness of the sixth form**

### **Grade: 3**

The sixth form provides a satisfactory and improving quality of education for students, and prepares them effectively for their future lives. Students have access to a wide range of AS, A level and vocational courses which meet their needs and aspirations well. The range of vocational courses has increased since the last inspection. Standards are below average but, based on their earlier performance in GCSE examinations, students' achievement is satisfactory. The college's results have improved steadily over the past three years, although considerable variations continue to exist in the different subjects. Students do consistently well in subjects related to the college's specialism in the visual arts and in a few other subjects, but do less well in many others. The weaknesses in students' performance, for example in English, geography and law, have been evident over the past four years.

Students enjoy being in the sixth form and their personal development is good. The teaching is satisfactory overall, with examples of good and excellent teaching, particularly in the visual arts. Students respond well to their teachers and relationships between them are positive. Students consider that the pastoral care and support they receive are good, but comment that the feedback given to them from individual teachers is variable. The opportunity provided for them to discuss, record and review their personal targets varies in its quality and frequency across subjects. The enthusiastic and knowledgeable sixth form leader assumes that students want to do well and provides them with positive encouragement. However, the variability in the quality of the academic support students receive, together with the lack of a current sixth form development plan, mean that leadership and management are satisfactory overall.

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

- Improve standards and achievement in English and mathematics.
- Develop sharper whole-college systems to evaluate the college's work, especially teaching and learning, to provide senior leaders and governors with an accurate overview of its quality.
- Consistently provide all students with more challenging work which involves them actively in their learning.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 3**

Most students make satisfactory progress during their time at college although it varies from year to year. In 2007, students did better than expected in their GCSE examinations when account is taken of their starting points, but this good progress was not sustained in 2008. Although some students with learning difficulties performed well, many other lower attaining students and the higher attaining students, especially boys, did not do as well as predicted.

Students underachieved in English but performed as expected in mathematics. Standards remain below average in the main college and in the sixth form. The GCSE examination results have been below average in recent years but on some benchmarks they are improving. In 2008, the results at five or more A\* to C grades were lower than in the previous two years. One of the reasons for this drop was the weaker performance in information and communication technology (ICT), which the college's tracking systems did not identify early enough. At five or more A\* to C grades including English and mathematics, the results improved from 23% in 2007 to 27% in 2008 but remained below the level they were at in 2006. In the sixth form, the proportion of students gaining at least a pass grade in the A-level examinations has improved over the past three years.

The college has implemented a number of strategies to raise standards, especially to raise the proportion of students gaining higher grade passes in both English and mathematics. These strategies are improving some students' progress, especially in English and mathematics, but have yet to result in improved examination performance. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are making similar progress to that of their classmates.

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

### **Grade: 2**

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness is good as the college's visual arts specialism and the wide range of enrichment opportunities provided for students enhance these aspects of their personal development well. They have a good understanding of the need to eat a healthy diet and take regular exercise, and they willingly participate in the many sporting activities that the college provides. Through the college council, students play a considerable role in contributing to decision making, undertaking their own research to inform their proposals, for example visiting another school to obtain ideas about vertical tutor groups. They are well equipped for their future lives through the range of enterprise and work-related opportunities, work experience, and the development of teamworking and other relevant skills.

Most students enjoy college and attend regularly, although attendance rates are below average because of the persistent absence of a small minority. Their behaviour is satisfactory. The majority of students behave well, especially in lessons, so that learning is productive. During breaks and lunch times, behaviour is inconsistent, as shown by the high numbers that are excluded, many for poor or challenging behaviour. Students say they feel safe and recognise that staff will take swift action if they have any concerns. Students comment that the introduction of the vertical tutor groups and the good 'peer mentoring' system have enhanced relationships between year groups, reduced bullying and supported students experiencing difficulties more effectively.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 3**

Although there are many examples of good and sometimes outstanding practice, especially in the college's specialist subjects, the quality of teaching is only satisfactory overall as it is not consistent across the college to ensure that all students make good progress. This is reflected in the considerable variations in the subject results in the GCSE and sixth form examinations. Most students recognise that teachers want them to do well and so their attitudes to learning are generally good. Relationships between staff and students are usually positive and lessons

take place in a productive, although not always inspiring, atmosphere. Teachers plan their lessons adequately to include a variety of activities to help students learn but do not always ensure that the activities are matched closely enough to the range of ability in the class. This means that some students are not challenged enough, even in groups that are selected on the basis of their ability. In some instances, teachers do not identify clearly enough what learning is to take place in the lesson or check at the end whether learning has occurred.

Enthusiastic and well-informed subject knowledge, with clear lesson intentions and high expectations, characterise the most effective teaching and as a result, students make swift gains in their learning. In such lessons, students are encouraged to work independently and respond avidly to the teachers' searching questions. This good practice is not consistently applied across the college and in too many lessons, teachers direct and lead the learning too much, rather than involving students actively in paired and group work or encouraging extended contributions from them.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

### **Grade: 3**

Since the last inspection, the college has extended the curriculum for students in Years 10 and 11 by introducing more vocational courses, some of which are in response to local needs and circumstances. These developments are meeting the interests of many students more effectively but it remains a conventional curriculum. All students in Years 10 and 11 take an applied course in ICT and, in line with the college's specialism, are expected to follow an arts-related subject. Recent changes have included a well thought out alternative curriculum for a small group of students that meets their needs well and gives them a greater chance to succeed. As yet, there is no clear identification of different pathways to meet the needs of a wider group of students who may be disaffected with college life and are at risk of exclusion, levels of which are extremely high. The introduction of a project-based approach in Year 7, which draws together work in several subjects, is a positive move but it is too soon to evaluate its impact on developing students' wider learning skills. The excellent quality of the work on display, which is the result of its visual arts specialism, has a stunning impact on the college environment. It also contributes to developing students' visual literacy skills, giving them real confidence in their learning in other subjects. The extensive range of enrichment and extra-curricular opportunities, many of which are related to the specialist subjects, contribute well to students' understanding of the wider global community, increase their enjoyment, give them responsibilities, and broaden their skills and experiences well.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 2**

The college provides a safe and caring environment for students. Procedures to ensure students' safety meet current requirements. The recent introduction of vertical tutor groups as part of the 'mini schools' is having a positive impact on students' personal development. Strategies to increase attendance and reduce the number of persistent absences have been successful, bringing the level of attendance closer to the national average. The college takes an uncompromising stance on inappropriate behaviour, to ensure that the majority of students learn in a calm and positive environment, but the consequence is that almost a fifth of students were excluded for a fixed period last year. Numbers remain high this year. The college successfully supports students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those with social, emotional and behavioural problems, through a number of specialist staff and a

variety of external agencies. The recent introduction of a reintegration centre to help excluded students cope with the transition back into the college works effectively. Strong links with primary schools, especially through the federation, ensure a smooth transition to Year 7 and students receive good guidance on their choice of GCSE and sixth form courses, and their future pathways beyond college.

The assessment and tracking of students' progress has become more frequent this year so that those in danger of underachieving can be identified sooner and given appropriate support. There are strengths in this system, although not enough is done to analyse students' progress in relation to their attendance and exclusions. Although there are examples of good practice in the college, the marking of students' work is inconsistent, varying in both quality and quantity, especially in giving students clear guidance on what they need to do to improve it and move to the next level.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 3**

Senior leaders are working hard to ensure that the college continues to develop and improve. They are committed to raising standards further and have taken swift action to deal with identified weaknesses in teaching and learning and in the weaker performing subjects. The impact of its visual arts specialist status, with the modelling of high quality work produced by students, the celebration of their achievement in displays around the college and its contribution to creating a positive ethos, are evidence of their vision for the college. The promotion of community cohesion through the wider curricular opportunities provided to students and the work of the federation to improve educational provision and social cohesion in the community, including the range of extended services, are particular strengths. Middle leaders are very positive about the quality of support they receive from senior leaders, their accessibility and the trust which is placed in them.

In spite of these strengths, there are a number of relative weaknesses that make leadership and management satisfactory rather than good. Self-evaluation is not always accurate because it is not based sufficiently on evaluating the impact of any actions undertaken. In addition, the analysis of data does not take enough account of the full range of indicators to support judgements on students' progress. As a result, some of the college's judgements are too generous. The quality of teaching and learning is monitored regularly, with feedback given to individual teachers. However, the records of the observations do not identify clearly enough the strengths and weaknesses in students' learning or include sufficient evaluation to help identify areas for whole-college development. The college's development plan is not up to date and lacks some important features, such as a clear identification of the most important issues to be tackled, specific timescales and details of how the progress of the plan will be monitored and by whom. Governors are clearly supportive of, and focused on, the work of the federation but are not doing enough to monitor the college's development plan.



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**Annex A**

**Inspection judgements**

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	<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>	3	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

**Achievement and standards**

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	3	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	3	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	3	

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

## Personal development and well-being

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

## The quality of provision

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

## Leadership and management

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	3	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

**Annex B****Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

30 January 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Astor College for the Arts, Dover CT17 0AS

Thank you for welcoming us when we visited the college recently. We enjoyed our discussions with you as well as looking at your work. We were particularly impressed with the stunning displays of artwork around the college. Your comments helped us to get a better understanding of the college's work and the progress you are making. This letter is to tell you what we found.

The college provides you with a satisfactory standard of education. Some aspects of the college's work are good. For example, the good care, support and guidance you receive help you to develop well as young citizens. The wide range of enrichment activities, especially those related to the visual arts, extend your skills and experiences and prepare you well for your future lives. You have a good understanding of how to keep healthy and safe, and many of you make a good contribution to the college and local community. Most of you have positive attitudes to learning and are keen to do well. The majority of you behave well in lessons. However, too many of you do not behave well enough or attend college regularly. This means that some of you do not do as well as you should.

Most of you make satisfactory progress during your time at college, both in Years 7 to 11 and in the sixth form. Standards are slowly improving but some of you, especially the most able, are capable of doing better than you currently do, particularly in English and mathematics. The college is giving you additional help through the after-school study sessions and you told us that you find these helpful. Teachers provide you with a variety of activities in lessons, but some of the work does not challenge you enough or involve you actively in your learning.

The senior staff who lead and manage the college are committed to helping you do the very best you can and to extend what the college has to offer you. We have asked them to do three things to improve the college's work.

- Help you make better progress to reach higher standards in English and mathematics.
- Develop sharper systems to check the college's work to provide senior leaders and governors with an accurate overview of its quality.
- Ensure teachers provide all of you with more challenging work and encourage you to contribute more actively in lessons.

Yours faithfully

Mrs Joan Greenfield

Lead inspector