

The Abbey College

Independent school inspection report

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Reporting inspector Mark Mumby HMI
Social care inspector Martha Nethaway

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under Section 162A¹ of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005², the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

The inspection of boarding provision was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000³ having regard to the national minimum standards for boarding schools, in order to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided.

Information about the school

The Abbey College provides education for male and female students aged 14 to 19 years. The college caters predominantly for students from abroad, although a small number of British students attend the college. All of the current students reside in the college's boarding houses. For a large proportion of the students, English is not their principal language. An English language programme is available to these students.

The College aims to, *'...foster a community of international understanding and shared values in which overseas students receive the quality of academic education and support in English language which will enable them to both succeed in the short term and in the longer term to progress successfully to higher education in the universities and subjects of their choice'*.

The college is privately owned and is situated on a 70 acre site in Malvern Wells in Worcestershire. It opened in 1874 and is registered for 80 students. There are currently 90 full-time students on roll. The college was last inspected by Ofsted in November, 2006. It was inspected by The British Accreditation Council for Independent Further and Higher Education in February 2007. The English language summer school provision was inspected by The British Council in July 2009. The college currently has an acting headteacher. A new principal will take up his post in January 2010.

¹ www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2002/ukpga_20020032_en_14#pt10-ch1-pb4-l1g162

² www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2005/ukpga_20050018_en_15#sch8

³ www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2000/ukpga_20000014_en_1

Evaluation of the school

The Abbey College provides a good quality of education for its students. The quality of boarding provision is satisfactory. The college is very successful in its aim of enabling students to obtain entry to university alongside developing their English language skills.

Arrangements for safeguarding do not meet current requirements and there are shortcomings in welfare arrangements. Consequently, the provision for students' welfare, health and safety is inadequate. A significant number of important regulations in this area are not met. The two regulations which were not met at the time of the last inspection have been rectified.

Quality of education

The curriculum is satisfactory. It has several strong features, but the college does not cover all of the required elements of the curriculum for students in their second GCSE year. Individual programmes for students in this year group may not include one or more of the following aspects: scientific, human and social, and aesthetic and creative. Nevertheless, the college does offer a wide range of courses which meet the needs of the students well. Students can study for a number of different awards including GCSE, IGCSE and A level as well as university foundation courses and English language courses. These programmes enable students to obtain recognised qualifications alongside developing their English language skills in line with the college's aims. Students speak highly of the options available and feel that they are prepared well for university.

The college makes effective use of published schemes of work and examination syllabi to ensure that courses are planned well. The options available are described clearly in the information provided to parents. There are strong links with medical and dentistry faculties of universities in the Czech Republic.

The personal, social and health education programme is comprehensive. It provides a good grounding in a wide range of areas including important aspects of citizenship. As a result, students gain a good understanding about living in the United Kingdom. There are good links between the education and boarding provision. Students continue their studies into the evening with prep as well as sports activities. There are visits to places of interest on Saturdays and this contributes towards the students' cultural development.

Teaching and assessment are good. This is because lessons are planned very well to meet the students' individual needs. The teachers know the students very well and use their good subject knowledge to plan learning activities which challenge the students' thinking. Teaching groups are small and teachers assess students' progress throughout each lesson through skilful questioning. Consequently they are able to provide carefully targeted guidance and support, moving students on in their learning as soon as they are ready. As a result, lessons move on at a brisk pace and

students make good progress. Teachers use a good range of different teaching strategies, moving quickly between direct teaching, independent working and interactive activities in order to bring out the best from the students. Teachers check students' understanding carefully throughout each lesson, explaining things in different ways to ensure that those with limited English language skills are not impeded in their learning.

The college does not analyse students' attainment and progress in a systematic way. There is no framework in place to evaluate students' performance in relation to national norms or the school's aims. Nevertheless, evidence about the future education of A level and foundation level students leaving in 2009 indicates that the school is very successful in meeting its aim to enable students to obtain places at University. Forty three out of forty seven students obtained university places; twenty four of these students going on to study medicine or dentistry in Prague.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good. Their behaviour around the college is good and they have very good attitudes in lessons. Students from a wide range of cultural backgrounds relate very well to one another in the friendly environment of the college. There are excellent relationships between students and teachers. Good opportunities are taken for students to develop their own cultural understanding by sharing their own experiences. For example, in a humanities lesson, students were able to share knowledge about their home countries. The citizenship programme contributes to the students' sound understanding about public institutions and services in England. The college provides a range of opportunities for students to contribute to the school community, both during the day and into the evenings and weekends. For example, there is a charities committee which is successful in organising a range of entertaining fundraising events. However, despite articulating strong views about their food preferences, few students are willing to join a food committee.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The provision for students' welfare, health and safety is inadequate. Procedures to safeguard students do not meet current requirements. For example, staff vetting procedures are not robust enough. Although the college has designated a senior member of staff to have responsibility for child protection, this person is not suitably trained.

The college has a policy in place for visits away from the college site. However, this policy lacks sufficient detail to ensure that visits are adequately planned. For example, the planning sheet does not require information about modes of transport to be included. Risk assessments for off-site visits are not robust enough because they do not consistently assess risks accurately and provision to minimise risks is not always sufficient. The college's anti-bullying policy is insufficiently detailed. It does not include an adequate definition of bullying or provide sufficient clarity about how

incidents of bullying should be dealt with. The college does not have a discrete behaviour policy. College rules are included within the student handbook. However, these are not enforced systematically. For example, the clearly defined dress code is routinely ignored by many students and the sanctions are not applied.

The college has an appropriate number of members of staff trained in first aid and keeps suitable records of accidents. However, the college's first aid policy is insufficiently detailed. For example, it does not include guidance about the level of injury that would trigger an emergency ambulance call, or explain procedures on how to deal with spillages of bodily fluids. The college carries out suitable risk assessments for fire and routine evacuation practices take place.

Students have a good understanding about how to lead healthy lifestyles. They are provided with healthy meals and students of compulsory school age take regular exercise as part of the curriculum. Formal registration takes place each morning and students are supervised well in lessons and around the college.

The college has planned well to increase accessibility and will be drawing up a further plan to review the possibility of further improving access.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The college has not been sufficiently rigorous when appointing staff. It has not routinely carried out all of the required checks about an applicant's suitability to work with children before confirming their appointment. Two members of staff appointed in September 2006 and October 2008 do not have enhanced criminal records bureau checks. At the start of the inspection there was no evidence to show that these two members of staff had been checked against List 99 which lists all those persons barred from working with children. These List 99 checks were carried out retrospectively during the inspection. The college does not have evidence to show that sufficient references were obtained for six members of staff appointed between September 2006 and August 2009. The college's single central record of its staff checks does not meet current requirements. Furthermore, the record that the college does have in place is incomplete. The failure to carry out medical checks identified at the time of the last inspection has been rectified.

School's premises and accommodation

The college is housed in a series of buildings situated on a large and picturesque site on the edge of the Malvern Hills. The teaching areas are of sufficient size for the small teaching groups. They are clean, bright and in a sound state of repair. Students benefit from specialist rooms for discrete science subjects as well as art and information communication technology (ICT). The ICT room has been improved since the last inspection and the inappropriate seating has been replaced with suitable adjustable chairs. There is a good-sized hall, a gymnasium and an outdoor swimming pool for use in the summer months. There is a library with full-time librarian. This library is well-stocked with a good range of resources including daily newspapers and university prospectuses.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The college provides most of the required information for parents of students and prospective students through its clearly presented website and brochure. However, it does not meet the requirement to provide parents with a copy of its safeguarding children policy, either in paper form or on the college's website. The college provides detailed information about the attainment and progress of each student to parents through four written reports each year. It has responded to parents views in this respect and is currently amending the format of these reports to make them more focused and accessible to parents.

Procedures for handling complaints

The college has a clearly written and fair complaints procedure which meets the requirements.

Effectiveness of the boarding provision

The quality of boarding is satisfactory. Most of the nNational mMinimum sStandards are met. The recommendations from the college's last welfare inspection are met.

There is a new management structure to the boarding team including the appointments of a new pPrincipal and hHead of bBoarding. The interim management arrangements for the boarding house are satisfactory. Staff are committed and clearly enjoy working with the students. Boarding staff work well together and there are enough staff available. Teaching staff work across boarding provision to provide extra help with activities and spend time with students. Staff receive satisfactory induction training. This assists them to develop the broad baseline knowledge and practical skills required for boarding duties.

The provision for equality and diversity is good. The college's values, ethos and teaching results in students who are interested and inquisitive about the wider world. This means students truly appreciate the significance of differing spiritual values and have respect for each other.

Students' medical needs are met well. They have access to appropriate medical treatment and first aid. Students have access to information and guidance with regard to health and social issues. This helps students gain a better awareness of healthy living. The school nurse has a nursing degree from her home country. However, she does not hold a current registration with the United Kingdom Nursing and Midwifery Council and, therefore, should not be using the title of nurse or operating in that capacity.

Catering arrangements are well managed via a central kitchen and all meals are taken in the main dining room. The range and quality of food is highly criticised by

students. The college is working hard to enable students to influence what they eat but students appear reluctant to participate within these forums. However, mealtimes are sociable occasions and the food overall is of good quality.

The system in place to promote the safety and welfare of students is adequate. Students commented that they 'feel safe'.

There are no child protection concerns with regard to boarding since the last inspection. Staff receive appropriate child protection and safeguarding training. However, the designated lead for child protection has not yet attended advanced training. This potentially compromises the development of essential skills and knowledge around the latest guidance on child protection.

The college has in place, satisfactory systems and structures to meet its health and safety obligations including risk assessments for the premises and fire prevention checks. However, the college lacks a coherent annual health and safety audit for the whole campus. This potentially compromises the proper development and assessment of the environmental management systems to minimise hazards. For example, the college is using overhead fluorescent lighting without it being encased.

The college has in place a satisfactory vetting and selection policy and procedure. However, there are a few shortfalls that highlight inconsistency with the college's recruitment practices. For example, interview notes have not always been evidenced and employment gaps not being robustly checked. This weakens the college's safe recruitment practice and has the potential to place students at unnecessary risk.

Students' behaviour is good throughout the college. The policy on countering bullying is underdeveloped and does not provide clear definitions of bullying to cover adequately the measures to prevent and respond to such incidents. Students commented that bullying is not a problem at the college. This is because staff communicate a 'no tolerance' approach to unwanted bullying behaviours.

Students receive good support when they need it. The college values both the spiritual and moral development of each person, fostering supportive and caring relationships. Students are clear about which member of staff they can go to for personal support and they comment that, 'boarding is really good because you meet new friends from all over the world. It feels just like you are in one big happy family'.

Students' contributions to the operation of boarding are under-developed. The college successfully engages students with the weekly houseparents' meeting. However, other consultation mechanisms are not capitalising on the student voice, such as, committees and school council. The college is working positively to redress this gap.

Students are able to move into, and leave the school, in a planned and sensitive manner. They are also able to keep regular contact with their family and friends.

The college provides an adequate range of boarding accommodation. It is beginning to refurbish boarders' accommodation which is acknowledged by students as only reaching a satisfactory standard. One student commented, 'I like Abbey College and it has improved from what it was when I first came here'. The communal toilets and washing provision provides students with appropriate levels of privacy.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The college meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended ('the Regulations'), with the exception of those listed below.⁴

The college does not meet all requirements in respect of the curriculum (standard 1) and must:

- provide all students of compulsory school age with a curriculum which includes scientific, human and social, and aesthetic and creative aspects (paragraph 1(2)(a)(ii))
- put in place a framework by which pupil performance can be evaluated by reference to either the school's own aims, as provided to parents and/or, by national norms (paragraph 1(4)).

The college does not meet all requirements in respect of provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety (standard 3) and must:

- prepare and implement a written policy to prevent bullying which has regard to the DCSF guidance Safe to Learn: Embedding anti-bullying work in schools (DCSF-00656-2007) (paragraph 3(2)(a))
- ensure the college has a senior member of staff designated with responsibility for child protection who is trained to the required standard in compliance with DCSF guidance Safeguarding children and safer recruitment in education (DCSF-04217-2006) (paragraph 3(2)(b))
- prepare and implement a written policy relating to the health and safety of pupils on activities outside the college which has regard to DCSF guidance Health and safety of pupils on educational visits (DCSF ref:HSPV2) (paragraph 3(2)(c))
- prepare and implement a written policy to promote good behaviour amongst pupils which sets out the sanctions to be adopted in the event of pupils misbehaving (paragraph 3(2)(d))

⁴ www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2003/20031910.htm

- prepare and implement a suitable written policy on first aid (paragraph 3(6)).

The college does not meet all requirements in respect of suitability of proprietor and staff (standard 4) and must:

- prior to the confirmation of the appointment of all staff ensure that professional references are obtained (paragraph 4(2)(a))
- prior to the confirmation of the appointment of all staff ensure that an enhanced criminal record check is made by the proprietor (paragraph 4(2)(b))
- prior to the confirmation of the appointment of any person for whom, by reason of living or having lived outside the United Kingdom, obtaining an enhanced criminal record check is not sufficient to establish his or her suitability to work in a school, ensure further checks are made as the proprietor considers appropriate having regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State (paragraph 4(2)(c))
- ensure that no member of staff or volunteer carries out work at the college in contravention of any direction made under section 142 of the 2002 Act(a) or any disqualification, prohibition or restriction which takes effect as if contained in such a direction (paragraph 4(2)(d))
- prior to the appointment of all staff ensure that a check has been made by the proprietor that Standard 38 of the national minimum standards for boarding schools is complied with (paragraph 4(2)(e))
- ensure that the college keeps a single central record of the checks it carries out on each member of staff and volunteer in compliance with DCSF guidance Safeguarding children and safer recruitment in education (DCSF-04217-2006) (paragraph 4C(2) and (3))
- ensure that the checks carried out on the proprietor are recorded on the college's single central record (paragraph 4C(6) and (7)).

The college does not meet all requirements in respect of the provision of information for parents, carers and others (standard 6) and must:

- publish on its website or send to parents of pupils (and of prospective parents on request) a copy of their safeguarding children policy (paragraph 6(4)).

In order to meet the national minimum standards for boarding Schools and associated regulations the college must:

- ensure that the college nurse is registered with the United Kingdom Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMS 15.3)
- develop the countering bullying policy to cover measures to prevent bullying and to respond to observed or reported bullying, and also include a definition of bullying (NMS 2.2)
- ensure the designated member of staff attends the Local Safeguarding Children's Board training (NMS 3.6)
- ensure the college's system for recruiting staff follows all the elements outlined in Standard 38.2 (NMS 38.2)
- ensure the indoor and outdoor areas used by, or accessible to, boarders is free from reasonably avoidable safety hazards (NMS 47.1)
- develop systems further for encouraging student contribution in the operation and life of the college so they become embedded in practice (NMS 12.2)
- ensure the refurbishment and redecoration plan for the boarding houses continues, with the aim to maintain adequate boarding accommodation for students (NMS 40.1)

Inspection judgement recording form

outstanding	good	satisfactory	inadequate
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The quality of education

Overall quality of education		✓		
How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of pupils			✓	
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of pupils' needs		✓		
How well pupils make progress in their learning		✓		

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		✓		
The behaviour of pupils		✓		

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils				✓
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The quality of boarding provision

Evaluation of boarding provision			✓	
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School details

Name of school	The Abbey College		
DCSF number	885/6026		
Unique reference number	117035		
Type of school	International college		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	1874		
Age range of pupils	14–19		
Gender of pupils	mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 70	Girls: 20	Total: 90
Number of boarders	Boys: 70	Girls: 20	Total: 90
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Annual fees (boarders)	£17,950–£18,950		
Address of school	253 Wells Road Malvern Wells Worcestershire WR14 4JF		
Telephone number	01684 892300		
Fax number	01684 892757		
Email address	enquiries@abbeycollege.co.uk		
Headteacher	Liz Harewood (acting)		
Proprietor	Mr Hekmat Kaveh		
Reporting inspector	Mark Mumby HMI		
Dates of inspection	4–5 November 2009		