

Abbey College

Independent school standard inspection report

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Reporting inspector	Michael Best
Social care inspector	David Morgan

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.^{1, 2}

The inspection of boarding provision was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 having regard to the national minimum standards for boarding schools in order to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and the government of the quality and standard of the service provided.³

Information about the school

The Abbey College provides full-time education for male and female students aged between 14 to 24 years. There are 92 students on roll. Nearly all students are boarders but a few choose to stay with host families and attend daily or, for mature students, live independently. Established in 1979, it caters predominantly for students from abroad, although a small number of British students attend the college. Almost 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. There are no students with a statement of special educational needs.

The college prospectus states: 'Our college is a special place in which to study, work and live and there is a very strong sense of community and belonging here. We understand that once a child is happy they can learn and develop and it is our aim to produce happy, well qualified students who will go on to achieve fantastic things once they leave us.'

The college also runs a number of short courses during the year and in holiday periods. These include courses in English as an additional language, summer school activities and intensive courses of one or two weeks' duration leading to entrance examinations for medicine and dentistry courses at European universities. These were not inspected on this visit.

The college is privately owned and is situated on a 70 acre site in Malvern Wells in Worcestershire. The education provision was last inspected by Ofsted in November 2009 and a further visit was made in June 2010 to check on the progress made in addressing those regulations that had not been met. The British Accreditation Council for Independent Further and Higher Education last inspected the college in 2010. The English language summer school provision was inspected by The British Council in 2009. The social care provision was inspected by Ofsted in November 2009 and an

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

unannounced social care emergency visit was made to the college in March 2011 in response to concerns raised by the local fire safety officer.

The current Principal took over in January 2011, having previously been Principal from September 2002 to August 2009 and a consultant in the intervening period. In addition, there have been a number of changes in the leadership team, teaching and support staff since the inspection in November 2009.

Evaluation of the school

Abbey College provides a good quality of education. It is successful in meeting its stated aims by enabling students to make good progress and move on to their chosen destinations for higher education. The curriculum, teaching and assessment are good and meet students' needs effectively. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, as is their behaviour. Safeguarding requirements are met in respect of checking the suitability of staff and other adults. However, the welfare, health and safety of the students, together with the provision for and organisation of boarding, are inadequate. Although the College successfully addressed the independent school regulations that were not met at the time of the previous inspection, it now fails to meet a number of requirements for registration.

Quality of education

The quality of education is good. The college provides students with a curriculum that is well-matched to their needs and aspirations, enabling them to learn and make progress effectively. Improvements since the last inspection have ensured that students of compulsory school age have experience in all the required areas of learning. All students, including those post-16, follow programmes that prepare them well for the next stage of their education.

Most students have English as an additional language and are seeking to improve their skills in order to access higher education courses taught in English. The college provides courses at different levels in speaking and listening, reading and writing, with additional help and accelerated provision available where needed. In response to the assessment of students' needs and prior learning, the college has rightly identified the need for increased emphasis on academic writing skills and is adjusting its provision accordingly. GCSE courses are available over one or two years and AS and A2 courses are well established. The college also runs Foundation courses to prepare students for university entrance in business studies, medicine and engineering. These often include additional numeracy components to ensure that students have the solid grounding required.

A strength of these Foundation courses is the emphasis on students' specific needs, for example this year's Engineering Foundation course is focusing on architectural engineering. The college rightly recognises that some more-able students have the

capacity for more challenging courses and is planning to widen the provision at both GCSE and A-level.

Most students enter the college with a clear idea of the next stage of their education and staff provide further guidance about careers and higher education courses which helps inform final choices. The college provides all students with a comprehensive programme of personal, social and health education, including citizenship. This includes key skills in independent living, financial management, health and culture and prepares them well for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life.

The quality of teaching and assessment is good and this underpins students' good progress. Nearly all students are successful in gaining admission to their chosen university and course, reflecting the college's success in meeting its aims. Teachers' subject knowledge is strong and relationships with students are good. Numbers in each class are generally small and teachers use a range of different teaching styles and methods well to meet their students' preferences and needs. Effective use of assessment information moves students' learning forward, taking good account of the diverse range of their prior attainment and knowledge. Teachers have a good knowledge of their students' strengths and areas for improvement, which is reflected in their careful identification of the next steps in learning. They make good use of questioning to test, extend and secure students' skills, knowledge and understanding.

Students' work is systematically assessed and often reviewed in one-to-one discussions. Most lessons proceed at a good pace and include a suitable balance between teacher input and students' independent learning. Occasionally, where teaching is satisfactory, the pace is slower and more-able students are not always fully challenged. In such situations, teachers' otherwise good management of learning falters and students sometimes engage in low-level disruptive behaviour which further slows the progress of the whole group.

With most living in the college's boarding accommodation, students are regularly able to contact teaching staff outside their timetabled lessons. Students of compulsory school age are supervised each evening in their 'prep' session and older students are encouraged and supported in setting regular time aside for individual study and the completion of course work. The majority of students are content with these arrangements and with the library provision, although some would like it open for longer periods. However, nearly all the students who spoke to inspectors expressed exasperation at the lack of a reliable and efficient internet service in the college. The college leaders are aware of these shortcomings and have made attempts to resolve the issue, but with limited success. The lack of such facilities has an adverse impact on the otherwise good quality and use of the learning resources.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Students say that they enjoy being at the college and this is reflected in their regular attendance and participation in lessons. Behaviour in lessons and around the school is good. In most lessons, students settle down quickly to their work and apply themselves diligently. They have a good understanding of what is right and wrong and develop a respect for equality. They get on well with each other and with staff, look out for each other and are welcoming and polite to visitors. While sometimes excitable and exuberant, students act responsibly and the atmosphere in the college is warm and friendly. Nearly all students follow the college's dress code and arrive punctually for lessons.

The college organises regular visits to places of interest, theatres and leisure facilities, which are supported and enjoyed by all age groups. Themed evenings, when students help prepare meals and organise entertainment reflecting their different cultural backgrounds, do much to cement international links and promote the appreciation of the beliefs and customs of other people. The citizenship programme provides some excellent opportunities for students to learn about different faiths and cultures, as well as democracy and public services and institutions in England. This, along with their good progress in learning, contributes positively to their future economic well-being; however, the inadequacy of the boarding accommodation reduces the overall impact of the college's provision for economic well-being to satisfactory.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The welfare, health and safety of students are inadequate. There are particular shortcomings in the boarding provision. The specific failings in the college's safeguarding checks on the suitability of adults working in the college, as reported at the time of the last inspection, have been addressed and recruitment procedures are now good. The designated person for child protection has attended the required advanced level training and members of the senior leadership team are currently undertaking training at an intermediate level. The college's child protection policy reflects the local safeguarding board's requirements and has due regard to government guidance. However, the college was not able to provide inspectors with records of training for all staff in child protection. Inspectors found that a number of recently-appointed staff were unaware of their responsibilities for child protection or the procedures to be followed.

The college's policies for behaviour and the prevention of bullying reflect government guidance and are implemented effectively. Staff are suitably deployed in supervising students during the teaching day, during leisure time and in the boarding houses. Registers are taken at the start of each lesson and any student absences are checked and recorded. Students are aware of the sanctions for misbehaviour and consider these to be fair. They report there to be little bullying and are confident that staff will deal with such incidents that occur promptly. Records maintained by the school show that serious incidents of misbehaviour are rare. The college has

implemented satisfactory procedures for students' health and safety on educational visits, although the minor amendments suggested at the progress monitoring visit in June 2010 have not been embedded in the policy. Students keep healthy: boarders and day students have a range of healthy options available at meal times and the extensive grounds provide many opportunities, formal and informal, for exercise and recreation. The recently-extended programme of health education has been received well by students. The college has a suitable first aid policy and a suitable number of designated first-aiders hold valid training certificates. The college maintains the information required for admissions electronically and can produce a printed copy, when required. To meet the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, as amended, the college has produced a three-year disability access plan.

There are a number of contributory factors to the college's non-compliance with the regulations regarding health and safety and fire safety, including the impact of changes in staffing and contractors. The proprietor has acted promptly to address the fire officer's concerns in respect of the boarding houses and areas used for teaching and administration. However, much remains to be done in order to meet the deadlines set. At the present time, and despite some positive provision, students' safety is inadequate overall. Too many staff are unaware of their responsibilities for health and safety or how to deal with day-to-day situations. The college leaders recognise that the arrangements for promoting health and safety are inadequate and that, without help, they cannot resolve these shortcomings. They have now engaged a specialist consultant to prepare a full risk assessment and assist in establishing rigorous procedures and training.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

The school complies fully with the regulations in respect of the checks made on prospective employees and others with regard to their identity and suitability to work with students.

Premises and accommodation at the school

The college meets most, but not all, of the regulations. Situated on a steeply-sloping and extensive site on the Malvern Hills, the college occupies a range of buildings, many of which have been used for education purposes for over 130 years. Mains services are connected for electricity, gas, water and drainage although the college was not able to locate the written results of all the latest water safety checks. The college makes the necessary adjustments to accommodation and facilities for students who have physical disabilities. There are appropriate arrangements for evacuating buildings but during the inspection not all fire exits were kept clear. Classrooms are of a suitable size and satisfactorily furnished. Specialist facilities for science are adequate. The gymnasium is marked out for basketball and other ballgames. Students are keen to see the provision of a fitness suite completed.

A programme of refurbishment of the boarding, teaching and administrative accommodation is underway. Many of the shortcomings in the premises and accommodation are the result of a back-log of regular maintenance. For example,

not all washrooms have a supply of hot water or soap or have effective hand-drying facilities. In the boarding houses, bathrooms are not cleaned to an acceptable standard, with patches of mould unchecked. While the standard of cleanliness in the main kitchens was not a cause for concern, that in the boarding house kitchenettes was inadequate. Too many areas of the school are not maintained in a clean, tidy and hygienic state and the overall standard of decoration and maintenance is inadequate. While the sound insulation and acoustics are satisfactory, a number of light fittings do not meet safety requirements and the mechanical ventilation of some areas is not effective. In a number of areas, the flooring is worn, stained or loose. A number of students reported that the heating in their bedrooms and some classrooms was insufficient. Due to the time of year, it was not possible for inspectors to check this but the college asserts that it does monitor room temperatures in response to students' concerns. However, the leaders have provided students with a schedule of the times when the heating in the boarding houses is programmed to be on both during the day and at night. This indicates that heating is not normally on in the boarding houses during teaching time when students are in lessons.

Provision of information

The college meets most, but not all, of the regulations. Information is provided for parents, carers and other interested parties in a paper prospectus and on the college's website. Details of the boarding provision are reflected throughout the information provided and include good guidance for students travelling unaccompanied. Some omissions in the provision of information were resolved during the course of this inspection but there remain instances where the availability of policies, procedures and other information is not signposted, as required. These generally refer to matters relating to the welfare, health and safety of students and to the number of complaints received in the last reporting period.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

The school's procedures meet most, but not all, of the regulations. The college updated its procedures during the course of the inspection and the most recent version is now available as a link from the college's website. However, in their responses to inspectors, a high proportion of students and their parents and carers commented adversely about complaints not being followed up. Inspectors found that the leaders' interpretation of the procedures was such that none of the concerns raised by students and others were classed as complaints, as required by the college's own documentation and the regulations. The last entry in the complaints log predates the 2009 inspection. This record does not reflect the overwhelming evidence provided to inspectors on this visit.

Effectiveness of the boarding provision

The quality of boarding provision is inadequate.

Boarders' health is managed well and there are suitable records. However, records do not always show if parental permission has been obtained for medical procedures. The food offered to students is of good quality, cultural variety, quantity and nutritional value. Systems are used to adjust menus to meet students' needs. Students can also supplement the meals with food from various local sources, if they choose.

Students feel safe on site, bullying is effectively managed and theft is minimal. Discipline is implemented in a reasonable way. Training in child protection procedures is not rolled out to all staff. Fire safety measures are inadequate; they are insufficiently understood by staff at all levels and do not meet the fire safety officer's requirements. Fire safety concerns include: the maintenance of fire escape routes and of fire assembly points; and the potential of electrical items such as ovens and fans to become fire risks if not properly cleaned. Although substantial investment is underway, this has not been well managed and some new installation has been wrongly fitted. The lack of properly installed or monitored fire safety measures is a concern to both Ofsted and the fire authority.

Health and safety audits, risk assessments, monitoring and understanding are inadequate. This results in substantial health risks and hygiene shortfalls that compromise the welfare of students and staff.

Complaints and concerns by students are not appropriately responded to or recorded, although procedures to do so are in place. This means that students and staff do not believe that their legitimate concerns will always be addressed.

There is excellent integration of students from all over the world. Students appreciate and support each other and enjoy the variety of activities that are provided on and off site. They benefit from and contribute to a pleasant atmosphere in the college. Substantial improvements have been made to the recreational facilities and investment is ongoing. Students have good opportunities to contribute to the development of boarding via several committees and they enjoy particularly positive relationships with staff. Students are correctly concerned that internet access, and therefore their ability to contact their families in other countries, is inadequate in several houses.

The maintenance and cleanliness of the boarding houses are inadequate. Although improvements are underway, there are extensive shortfalls in the presentation of houses. There is insufficient cleaning of communal areas, shower areas and bedrooms, and an absence of cleaning of kitchenette equipment. There is also damage to property, including cracked windows.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The school implements effective equal opportunities policies and ensures that students from a wide range of countries are integrated well.

The organisational management of boarding is inadequate, as indicated by the shortfalls identified above. There is confusion among senior staff about precisely what constitutes boarding. There is a lack of focus and identification of common aims. Similarly, the written school development plan addresses boarding insufficiently and is not clear to staff. Monitoring does not occur at the intervals or in the way required. This increases the risk of important patterns being overlooked, for example, regarding formal complaints. Inadequate monitoring at several levels has resulted in insufficiently targeted staff training. This applies to boarding generally where there is a lack of awareness about the requirements of the national minimum standards; medication; fire safety; a wide range of health and safety issues; and child protection training for ancillary staff.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The proprietor has ensured that the school meets The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, schedule 1 ('the Regulations'), with the exception of those listed below.⁴

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of provision for welfare, health and safety of pupils (standards in part 3) and must:

- make arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils at the school and ensure these arrangements have regard to guidance issued by the Secretary of State (paragraph 7)
- ensure that arrangements are in place to safeguard and promote the welfare of boarders that have regard to the national minimum standards for boarding schools (paragraph 8)
- put in place effective measures to ensure pupils' health and safety which have regard to the DfES guidance *Health and safety: responsibilities and powers (DfES 0803/2001)* (paragraph 11)
- ensure that there is compliance with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (paragraph 13).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the premises of and accommodation at schools (standards in part 5) and must:

- ensure that the water supply meets the requirements of the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999 (paragraph 23(a))
- ensure that there are sufficient washrooms for staff and pupils, including facilities for pupils with special needs and disability, which take account

⁴ www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2010/1997/contents/made

of regulations 3 and 4 of the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999 (paragraph 23(j))

- ensure that there are adequate facilities for the hygienic preparation, serving and consumption of food (paragraph 23(l))
- ensure that classrooms and other parts of the school are maintained in a tidy, clean and hygienic state (paragraph 23(m))
- ensure that the lighting, heating and ventilation in the classrooms and other parts of the school are satisfactory and have regard to the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999 (paragraph 23(o))
- ensure a satisfactory standard and adequate maintenance of decoration (paragraph 23(p))
- ensure that there is appropriate flooring and that this is in good condition (paragraph 23(r))
- ensure that regard is given to standards 40–52 of the national minimum standards for boarding schools (paragraph 23(t)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the provision of information (standards in part 6) and must:

- make available to parents of students and others:
 - particulars of the school's policy on and arrangements for exclusions
 - particulars of educational and welfare provision for pupils with statements of special educational needs and for pupils for whom English is an additional language
 - particulars of policies relating to bullying, health and safety, and the promotion of good behaviour, as required under part 3, paragraph 9
 - particulars of the arrangements for promoting pupils' health and safety on the school premises and on educational visits as required under part 3 paragraphs 10, 11 and 12
 - details of the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year (paragraph 24(1)(b)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the manner in which complaints are to be handled (standards in part 7) and must:

- provide for written records to be kept of all complaints, indicating whether they were resolved at the preliminary stage or whether they proceeded to a panel hearing (paragraph 25(j)).

In order to meet the national minimum standards for boarding schools and associated regulations, the school should:

- ensure all staff with boarding duties receive child protection training (NMS 3.5)
- ensure written parental permission has been obtained in advance for medications and health treatments when required (NMS 15.14)
- ensure the indoor and outdoor areas used by, or accessible to, students are free from reasonably avoidable safety hazards (NMS 47.1)
- ensure there is an effective system of risk assessment, which is implemented and understood by staff (NMS 47.9)
- ensure the school complies with the recommendations of the Hereford and Worcester Fire Service (NMS 26.1)
- ensure windows accessible to boarders above the ground floor and presenting a risk to safety are fitted with suitable opening restrictors or alternative safety measures (NMS 47.3)
- ensure the boarding houses are adequately maintained and are clean (NMS 40.1 and 40.3)
- ensure there is clear management and leadership of the practice and development of boarding in the school (NMS 8.1)
- ensure all staff with boarding duties receive induction training, and have opportunities for continuing training in boarding (NMS 34.1).

Inspection judgements

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

Effectiveness of boarding provision				✓
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School details

School status	Independent		
Type of school	International College		
Date school opened	10 December 1979		
Age range of pupils	14-24		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 70	Girls: 22	Total: 92
Number of boarders	Boys: 68	Girls: 19	Total: 87
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Annual fees (day pupils)	Based on £17,270		
Annual fees (boarders)	Based on £21,500		
Address of school	253 Wells Road, Malvern, WR14 4JF		
Telephone number	01684 892300		
Email address	Principal@abbeycollege.co.uk		
Headteacher	Philip Moere		
Proprietor	Hekmat Kaveh		