

Abbey College, Ramsey

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	131205
Local Authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	360230
Inspection dates	25–26 May 2011
Reporting inspector	Paula Heaney HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1371
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	221
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Madeleine Jackson
Headteacher	Wayne Birks
Date of previous school inspection	21 November 2007
School address	Abbey Road Ramsey PE26 1DG
Telephone number	01487 812352
Fax number	01487 813839
Email address	office@abbeycollege.cambs.sch.uk

Age group	11–18
Inspection dates	25–26 May 2011
Inspection number	360230

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the documentation in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA

T: 0300 123 4234

Textphone: 0161 618 8524

E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

© Crown copyright 2011

Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. They observed 34 lessons and saw 34 teachers. Meetings were held with groups of students (in meetings and at break times), governors and school staff. Inspectors observed the school's work, including arrangements for safeguarding, and looked at a range of documentation, including 130 questionnaires from parents and carers and 150 from students.

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

- Inspectors investigated why a significant proportion of students of lower ability did not make the expected progress in English and mathematics in 2010.
- The reasons why some groups of students with special educational needs made less progress in 2010 compared to their peers were examined.
- The question of whether the quality learning and progress in lessons is consistently good across all subject areas and in the sixth form was investigated.
- Inspectors looked into whether management actions are having sufficient impact in improving the quality of learning in the main school and in the sixth form.

Information about the school

Abbey College is a larger than average secondary school with a specialism in technology since 2006. Most students are of White British heritage. The school has slightly more boys than girls. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is below the national average. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make up a slightly higher proportion of the school population than nationally. The school holds the Artsmark Silver Award, the Inclusion Quality Mark and the Quality in Student Support Award.

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

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

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Abbey College is a good school, and its staff are committed to raising the aspirations and achievements of all its students so that they reach their potential. They are increasingly successful in this ambition, as demonstrated by the high pass rates students achieved in GCSE English and mathematics examinations in 2010, the highest the school has achieved to date. As a result the proportion of students gaining five or more GCSEs at grades A*-C is now well above the national average, as is the proportion of students gaining higher grades. Students following vocational courses achieve at high rates. Results in a few subjects are below the national average.

Staff at the college have focused sharply and consistently on improving the quality of lessons, by ensuring more of them meet students' needs and interests, and on good standards of behaviour. Most lessons on inspection were judged to be good with only a few satisfactory. Students have been closely involved in agreeing the expectations of good behaviour through designing and developing the school's 'COMMIT' charter on co-operation, organisation, maturity, motivation, initiative and tolerance. Staff and students alike have a clear understanding of what is expected of them, and inspectors saw these behaviours and positive attitudes demonstrated well in lessons and around the school. Together with the school's highly effective approach in instilling a strong sense of fairness and understanding through the 'faith and ethics' provision across the curriculum, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are outstanding. Success is rewarded and celebrated.

The school has a good capacity to improve further as leaders and managers, and the governing body, have a clear vision and understanding of where the school is and what needs to be done further. Actions to improve performance have been successful to date. Actions to improve students' performance for those who did not meet their English and mathematics targets and for students with special educational needs are underway and having a positive impact. Attendance in the school is regular for most year groups. For students with special educational needs it is around the national average. Records evaluating the performance of students from more vulnerable circumstances are not sufficiently clear in helping staff compare progress with that of their peers. Self-assessment is accurate, evaluative and helps the school improve further. A few parents and carers and younger students do not feel fully involved in decisions made by the school.

The effect of the school's work in partnership with over 300 organisations is outstanding in developing and broadening the opportunities that it can offer students. The school's specialism contributes very effectively in enhancing opportunities in mathematics, science and engineering. Value for money is good.

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

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

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- In the main school and the sixth form, further raise attainment in a few subjects where attainment is currently below the national average, by ensuring that all lessons:
 - are of a consistently good quality
 - provide stretch and challenge for the most able.
- Further raise the achievement of students with special educational needs by:
 - ensuring their attendance at school is at least in line with their peers
 - improving how their performance is recorded and evaluated so that managers and teachers are more clearly informed of the progress they are making in comparison with their peers.
- Increase opportunities for parents, carers and students to contribute their views on how well the school is doing and on proposals to improve the school further.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Students' examination results rose sharply in 2010 to well above the national average, having been at the national average since the last inspection. School data indicate that this improvement is continuing. The school focuses strongly on improving students' literacy and numeracy skills and more students are making the progress expected of them than in the past. Results in the combined science GCSE examination declined and were below average in 2010. However, many more students were entered for separate science examinations in 2010 than previously. Results in biology, chemistry and physics were in line with national averages last year. Plans to introduce a more appropriate combined science course are underway for September 2011. Students on vocational courses, such as engineering and business studies, achieve very well. In the few subjects that are underperforming, actions to improve performance are in place. High grade achievement rose significantly in 2010 and is above the national average.

Students enter the school with prior achievement that is broadly in line with the national average. Inspectors found that students make good progress overall, including students with special educational needs, as in most lessons learning and assessment activities enable students to build on their knowledge and skills very effectively. Students are clear what they need to do, and they know what they are achieving and what to do to improve further.

These are the other features of students' outcomes.

Most students say they enjoy school and learn a lot in lessons.

Students say they feel very safe in and around the school.

Their consistently good behaviour makes a strong contribution to learning. In no lessons seen was behaviour an obstacle to learning. Students work very well together in lessons. They are respectful and polite in and around the school.

Students willingly take on responsibilities around the school and community to support others and develop relationships with partner schools and groups.

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

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

A strong focus on developing students' work-related skills through lessons, work-related days and by the increasing range of vocational courses.

The development of faith and ethics is a particular strength of the school. Students show a very good understanding of the background and beliefs of a range of cultures. They show a very keen interest in ethical issues and resolve conflict effectively through a restorative justice scheme. Students are able to reflect sensitively on the views of others. This is very evident in lessons.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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

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

How effective is the provision?

Most lessons seen by inspectors were of a good quality. Inspectors' judgements matched closely with the school's judgements on the quality of lessons. Teachers enable students to work collaboratively and actively in their learning, and plan lessons imaginatively to interest and engage students. Tasks are matched well to ability and students know what they have to do to improve. Students are often involved in assessing their own work and that of their peers, which they do maturely. The good rapport between staff and students, and between boys and girls, promotes a positive learning environment in lessons and around the school. The school prepares the students well in how to learn and to develop good subject knowledge and skills. Information on students' prior achievements is used consistently well in lessons to promote learning. Information technology is used widely and effectively as a resource to support learning. Regular assessment activities are

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

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

recorded on the recently introduced 'STARS' system and monitored closely by senior leaders to inform performance through, for example, 'learning walks' around the school. In the few less effective lessons, the pace of learning was slow and not sufficiently challenging. In such lessons teachers often talked too much.

The school's specialism has enriched opportunities for all students to take part in a broad range of activities to prepare them well for their future choices. The increasing range of vocational courses meets the individual needs of students well. Work is underway to increase progression routes from Year 11 to the sixth form, particularly for students wishing to continue with science. The school offers a wide range of lunchtime and after-school clubs and take-up is high. Students speak with enthusiasm about the activities on offer, some of which lead to accredited awards and enable them to improve their confidence.

Students entering the school are settled in well. Effective arrangements are in place to identify students from potentially vulnerable circumstances and to ensure they receive appropriate support. Clear targets are set for students with special educational needs and/or difficulties and the support they receive enables them to make good progress. While information on their progress is recorded by teachers and managers, it is not sufficiently clear or helpful in informing further improvement. Good links exist with outside agencies to support students well and they receive good quality advice and guidance to help them progress into further study and work.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher and senior leaders have been successful in driving improvement throughout the school and in ensuring a culture of high expectations for students and staff. The middle management team has been strengthened successfully, particularly in English and mathematics. Leaders and managers use information and data well to track performance and to target areas of underperformance. While leader and managers are ambitious in their plans for further improvement a very small minority of parents and carers do not feel sufficiently involved in or knowledgeable about some of the decisions made. Improvements to the quality of lessons have been secured successfully through development and support for teachers to ensure a sharper focus on the quality of students' learning. This work continues, using information gathered from lesson observations to inform staff development activities. The governing body is highly influential in determining the school's strategic direction, working with the headteacher and senior staff. Governors have robust systems for evaluating school policies and

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

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

objectives. They meet their statutory duties very well. They seek out the views of parents and students, but have yet to develop more significant roles for parent governors in communicating the school's vision and recent significant gains in performance. Staff morale at the school is high.

The school has outstanding links with local businesses, schools, further education providers, universities and a wide range of other organisations to broaden opportunities, experiences and standards for its students. For example, uptake into sixth form chemistry has more than doubled as a result of events at a nearby school for more-able students, the number of students at risk of leaving education has reduced as a result of partnership work providing intensive support and the school has an outstanding record of participation in national competitions related to enterprise and science.

The school is highly committed to equality of opportunity and monitors the performance of different groups of students effectively. School data indicate actions to raise performance for lower-ability students in English and mathematics and for those with special educational needs are proving successful. While there are few opportunities in the local community to reflect diversity, the school promotes community cohesion well through its policies, such as the 'COMMIT' charter, which promotes tolerance in the school successfully. The number of exclusions and bullying incidents have decreased significantly. Safeguarding has a high profile in the school and child protection training is an important element of staff development. Staff know students well and are vigilant in their support. Comprehensive arrangements and policies are in place to ensure students' protection. Staff with safeguarding responsibilities are very knowledgeable about their responsibilities.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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

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

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

Sixth form

While students' results in their GCE A level examinations in 2010 were broadly in line with the national average, they were below average for GCE AS level. Results fell slightly compared to the previous year. The school acknowledges that a few students had progressed to the sixth form without the necessary entry requirements in the past. Entry requirements are adhered to more rigorously and advice and guidance on progression routes from Year 11 is more effective in guiding students to more suitable courses when compared with their starting points. Plans to increase vocational courses further at advanced level are underway. Attendance has improved significantly as a result of closer monitoring and the drop-out from AS to A level has reduced as students are now on more appropriate courses.

Leadership and management are good as actions to improve teaching and learning and student progress monitoring have had a positive impact. As in the main school, lessons seen by inspectors were of a consistently good quality. Students spoken to in meetings and around the college were very positive about their experience in the sixth form and the improvements the school has made overall. They welcome opportunities to become more involved in the school and to mentor younger students in particular. While sixth form data indicate increases in performance compared with previous years, it is too early to comment on the impact of improvement actions on examination results.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	3
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

Views of parents and carers

Although only a very small minority of parents responded to the questionnaire, a significant proportion of those who provided comments raised concerns including the quality of a few teachers, inconsistencies in how poor behaviour is dealt with, communication between the school and parents and carers, particularly regarding new initiatives, and the homework timetable. Inspectors looked into these concerns and their views are reflected in this report.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

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

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 130 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1371 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	25	19	83	64	16	12	2	2
The school keeps my child safe	38	29	84	65	4	3	4	3
My school informs me about my child's progress	44	34	62	48	22	17	2	2
My child is making enough progress at this school	35	27	64	49	26	20	3	2
The teaching is good at this school	25	19	72	55	27	21	3	2
The school helps me to support my child's learning	29	22	52	40	41	32	4	3
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	15	12	56	43	42	32	7	5
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	21	16	62	48	33	25	8	6
The school meets my child's particular needs	20	15	74	57	19	15	13	10
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	27	21	56	43	25	19	10	8
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	21	16	55	42	30	23	13	10
The school is led and managed effectively	31	24	55	42	23	18	19	15
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	35	27	55	42	26	20	12	9

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

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

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

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	48	6	0
Primary schools	6	47	40	7
Secondary schools	12	39	38	11
Sixth forms	13	42	41	3
Special schools	28	49	19	4
Pupil referral units	14	45	31	10
All schools	10	46	37	7

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

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 December 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

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

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

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

Common terminology used by inspectors

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

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



27 May 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Abbey College, Ramsey, PE26 1DG

I would like to thank you for your friendliness and courtesy during our visit. We enjoyed meeting you and appreciated your comments and opinions. We were impressed with how well you behave in lessons, how co-operatively you work together and how you listen to each others' views.

Yours is a good school which is continuing to improve. Results in GCSE English and mathematics examinations in 2010 were particularly good. Examination results in the sixth form in 2010 were broadly in line with national averages. The quality of teaching in most lessons is good, which helps you to make good progress. Staff at the school know you very well and set targets to encourage you to achieve to your potential. They support you to reach your targets and reward you for success. Most of you enjoy school, say you learn a lot in lessons and know what to do to improve. A few of you would like contribute more in decisions made by the school. Leadership and management in the school and in the sixth form are good.

We have asked the school to do the following:

Ensure all lessons are of a good quality and challenge you sufficiently.

Improve the attendance of students with special educational needs and how progress for these students is recorded to help improve achievement further.

Increase opportunities for you and your parents and carers to contribute on how well the school is doing and on proposals to improve the school further.

You can help by continuing to behave well, working to your potential in lessons and letting the school know your views. We wish you success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Paula Heaney

Her Majesty's Inspector

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.