

Abbey College Cambridge

Welfare inspection report for a boarding school

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Inspector	Dorrit Andrews

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out under the Children Act 1989, as amended by 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 government of the quality and standard of the service provided.^{1,2}

Information about the school

Abbey College is a part of the 'Alpha Plus Group Ltd.' company. It occupies four separate premises in the centre of Cambridge and has been operating as a college since 1994. It received its present designation as an independent school in April 2010 and boarding school in September 2011. The college provides education for students in the age range 14 to 21 years, and there are currently 230 students on roll. The great majority of students come from abroad and speak English as an additional language. Mainland China, Malaysia, Vietnam and Nigeria are the students' principal countries of origin.

Boarding accommodation for students under 18 years of age is currently provided in one boarding house and with host families. This is the college's first inspection of its boarding provision.

¹ www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/contents.

² www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/typesofschools/a00192112/boarding-schools.

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	outstanding
Outcomes for boarders	outstanding
Quality of boarding provision and care	outstanding
Boarders' safety	outstanding
Leadership and management of boarding	outstanding

Overall effectiveness

The key findings of the boarding inspection are as follows.

- The overall effectiveness of the boarding provision is outstanding. The provision has a highly effective impact on students' social and personal development.
- Students benefit from high quality care and integrated pastoral support across the college community.
- Students are provided with extensive opportunities to develop their skills, interests and talents by joining clubs and participating in a wide programme of activities during the college week and at weekends.
- Students enjoy their experience, are happy, feel safe and make new friends in a highly inclusive environment.
- Staff are very positive in their views and demonstrate energy, drive and commitment to support students in achieving their aspirations and preparing for transition to their next stage of education.
- The leadership and management of the boarding provision are highly efficient and effective. There is a clear vision of the purpose and benefits of the boarding experience for students and a strong commitment to continuing improvement.
- Safeguarding arrangements are robust. The college's comprehensive induction programme places students' safety and welfare at the centre.
- Regular evaluation of the college's provision is conducted to assess performance and drive forward improvement. Students' views are actively sought, listened to and contribute to the college's development.
- All national minimum standards are met.

Outcomes for boarders

Outcomes for students are outstanding. Students benefit greatly from an inclusive and relaxed boarding environment in which their views are valued and make a difference to the development of the boarding provision. Relationships with staff and with each other are constructive and positive and contribute to a greater understanding and tolerance of people from different cultures.

Students enjoy boarding and take full advantage of the opportunities and extensive range of activities on offer both during the week and at weekends. In turn they develop independence, a sense of responsibility, self-management and confidence. Activities offered also reach out to the wider community to promote students' sense of belonging and wider knowledge of the culture within which they are living and are likely to remain for further studies and university. For example, students help to manage the college library and café and a small group of volunteers provide weekly volunteer support to a local primary school helping with sport, drama and music as well as exchanging insights into each other's' cultures.

Students benefit from highly effective health and pastoral arrangements to promote their physical, emotional and psychological health. There is ready access to the college nurse for advice and guidance regarding health and well-being matters and an informed body of tutors who have good established links with boarding staff and host families for the sharing of any concerns. Whilst student participation in activities and clubs is strongly promoted alongside their studies to support their well-being, sensitive oversight is maintained to ensure that students do not overcommit themselves.

Students are well prepared for the next stage of life after college. The domestic scale of the boarding house enables students to acquire and develop practical life skills to prepare them for further education and adult life. For example, being responsible for undertaking their own laundry and preparing drinks and snacks helps them to become more self-sufficient. In addition, students are encouraged and supported to take responsibility for their finances and co-ordinating their travelling arrangements. Where appropriate, older students actively support younger individuals by sharing their experiences of different courses to gain more insight into the demands of further education. Strong emphasis is placed on attendance and punctuality and the college community working together with teachers, parents and students to support students in achieving their aspirations.

Quality of boarding provision and care

The quality of the boarding provision and care is outstanding. Excellent pastoral arrangements and resources support students' academic and personal progress and are a particular strength of the college. These include tutors, heads of year, mentors,

house parents, college nurse, the college's 'Here4U' initiative and the comprehensive induction programme. Staff work closely together across the college community to ensure students receive the support they need in relation to both personal and academic matters.

Students' health and well-being are promoted and supported extremely well. The college's nurse provides an outstanding service to students through an on-site clinic and drop-in sessions, plus advice and guidance to house parents and host families where required. Health promotion material is also readily available together with details of support services and help lines. All students are registered with the local health centre and are supported to attend health appointments. Active encouragement is given to students to take age appropriate responsibility for their own health and fitness as part of their developing maturity. This is further endorsed by an excellent range of extra-curricular opportunities, activities and clubs which provide opportunities for enhancing students' fitness, well-being, social skills and personal development. Activities currently include drama, choir, a wide range of sports, organised trips at weekends and participation in the college's 'ABC' programme. This programme is specifically designed to improve individuals' health and fitness, develop links between students and the local community and inspire creativity. Students work towards certificates at three levels reflecting their commitment to three areas.

Students are provided with healthy meals offering choice and variety. Snacks, fresh fruit and drinks are readily accessible outside main meal times. Suitable storage is made available for students' own foodstuffs. The quality, choice and quantity of food is commented on favourably by students who have had considerable input into improving the provision of meals in recent months.

Boarding accommodation is of a high standard, safe and well maintained and provides a welcoming environment where students can relax, study and be comfortable. Facilities are provided in the boarding house for students who are sick. Pupils' personal possessions are protected and there are no reports of items going missing. Students living with host families have regular opportunities to discuss their lodgings and raise any issues they may have; these are noted and acted upon.

Students are able to retain contact with their families and friends and can make and receive calls in private. Students have their own mobile phones plus use of free wireless access including use of face-to-face technology. A landline telephone is also available. Arrangements for contacting families take account of time differences to support the maintenance of contact. College and house staff, together with host families, maintain regular contact with parents to keep them informed.

Boarders' safety

The arrangements for ensuring students' welfare and safety are outstanding. Students' safety and welfare are placed at the heart of the college and staff and host

families are very aware of their responsibilities towards the young people in their care.

Effective policies, procedures and risk assessments, regularly reviewed and updated in response to changing circumstances, promote and safeguard the welfare of students. These include robust recruitment procedures, weekly monitoring meetings to discuss individual students who are facing particular difficulties and established links with the local safeguarding team. All staff receive child protection training and guidance appropriate to their role. Safeguarding matters are a primary focus of the college's comprehensive induction programme for new students, the vast majority of whom are from overseas. For example, time is taken to familiarise students with the locality, transport services and being conversant with road crossing systems. Talks are also presented by police and college staff about English law, relationships and identifying safe havens if lost in town. All students are issued with a personal alarm and an information pack with regard to support services and helplines. Safeguarding matters are also addressed through the college's curriculum and whole college assemblies.

Positive behaviour is promoted and is of a very high standard. Clear expectations are communicated to students regarding behaviour and house rules. No problems were raised by students or staff with regard to bullying or disrespectful behaviour. Minor misdemeanours are dealt with by house parents and host families, whilst more serious matters are reported to senior staff. There have been no incidents involving the use of restraint or of students going missing. Students report the rules are fair and they feel safe and cared for.

Regular safety and servicing checks are carried out to support the maintenance of a safe environment and students' are familiar with fire evacuation procedures and safety matters affecting them. Premises are secure and well maintained through prompt attention to repairs and effective maintenance. Clear expectations are communicated to host families in writing about providing and maintaining a safe environment for students. These matters are monitored through visits conducted by the college's Accommodation Officer.

Leadership and management of boarding

The leadership and management of the boarding provision are outstanding. There are clear aims for both the boarding and lodging provisions which are communicated well across the college community, to students, parents and host families. Strong leadership and management, together with continuous evaluation to assess the college's performance, ensures standards are maintained and improved further.

Staff are competent, highly committed and fulfil their roles and responsibilities effectively. All have access to extremely good support and guidance to assist them in their work. A programme of professional development is in place for staff to keep up to date and maintain core competencies and skills.

Excellent scrutiny and management of the boarding and lodging provisions ensure regular monitoring of the quality of care provided and the setting of targets to drive further improvement. Students views are actively and regularly sought and contribute to the development of the boarding provision, college community and induction programmes. There is a high degree of contact with parents by telephone, email and letter. Staff regularly update parents on their child's progress, any concerns and achievements.

National minimum standards

The school meets the national minimum standards for boarding schools.

What should the school do to improve further?

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.



04/12/2012

Dear Students

Inspection of Abbey College Cambridge

I enjoyed my recent visit to your college. I was made to feel very welcome and would like to thank you for the time you spent talking to me and joining you for your evening meal.

You told me lots of things you enjoy about boarding including making new friends, learning to be more independent and taking part in lots of different activities. You also told me you are able to keep your things safe and keep in regular contact with your family.

College and boarding house staff regularly talk to you about how you are feeling and progressing. Your views and suggestions are sought, valued and help to develop the boarding house and college.

The boarding house is welcoming, kept clean and safely run. You told me you feel safe. You know about fire drills and safety in the boarding house and when out on trips or involved in activities. Staff also talk to you about keeping safe.

I enjoyed meeting you and spending time in the boarding house. I wish you all good luck for the future.

Yours sincerely,

Dorrit Andrews