

Abacus College

Victory House, 116-120 London Road, Headington, Oxford, OX3 9AX

Inspection dates

1–2 May 2013

Overall effectiveness	Inadequate	4
Pupils' achievement	Adequate	3
Pupils' behaviour and personal development	Inadequate	4
Quality of teaching	Adequate	3
Quality of curriculum	Inadequate	4
Pupils' welfare, health and safety	Inadequate	4
Leadership and management	Inadequate	4

Summary of key findings

This school is inadequate because

- The proprietor and other leaders of the college have not been rigorous enough in ensuring that there is enough good and outstanding teaching to enable all students to make consistently good or better progress.
- While the academic curriculum for examinable courses is suitably planned, activities to promote the humanities, physical development, aesthetic and creative activity are not adequately provided, especially for students of compulsory school age.
- Students' attendance overall is low.
- The required safeguarding checks on staff have not been undertaken adequately or recorded properly. Staff have not received an appropriate level of child protection training. First aid arrangements are inadequate.
- Not enough attention has been given to planning for students' personal, social and health education or to developing their awareness of English institutions and British values of democracy.

The school has the following strengths

- The college is a harmonious place and students of all backgrounds get on well with each other.
- Arrangements to check on the day-to-day welfare of students are good, especially for those living with host and foster families.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school requires improvement and must take action to meet schedule 1 of The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, as amended by The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2012 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements. The details are listed in the full report.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection was carried out with a day's notice.
- The inspector observed the quality of teaching and students' learning in 11 lessons or parts of lessons. Nine teachers were observed.
- The college's key policies were scrutinised. Teachers' plans and schemes of work were reviewed and students' examination results for recent years were analysed. During the course of lessons, students' ongoing written work was viewed.
- Discussions were held with managers, teachers, the student services officer, students and host families. There were too few comments on Ofsted's online Parent View to use as a source of opinions.

Inspection team

Daniel Towl, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Abacus College opened in March 2012. It is registered for 160 students aged 13–18.
- There are currently 38 students on roll aged 14–18. Four students are of compulsory school age.
- The college is located in Headington, which is an area of Oxford.
- Nearly all students are from overseas and speak English as an additional language. Students come from a wide range of countries.
- No students have a statement of special educational needs.
- Most students lodge with host families and a few with foster families.
- The college aims to provide students with appropriate qualifications to access courses in universities in the United Kingdom.
- The college recently moved to new premises and had a change of Principal. It uses the additional provisions at the local sports centre and local parks.
- This is the college's first inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve leadership and management so that there is a clear and effective improvement plan and processes in place to:
 - check that the college is meeting and maintaining all of the independent school standards
 - monitor teaching regularly and provide training in order to ensure that more teaching is good
 - establish a rigorous process to measure the rate at which students are making progress towards challenging targets
 - raise levels of attendance.
- The school must meet the following independent school standards.
 - Ensure that all curriculum areas are supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work. Paragraph 2(1).
 - Ensure that the curriculum for compulsory school age pupils gives experience of the humanities and aesthetic and creative activities. Paragraph 2(2)(a).
 - Ensure that there is clear programme and scheme of work setting out the curriculum for personal, social and health education. Paragraph 2(2)(f).
 - Organise a programme of activities appropriate for students above compulsory school age to prepare them for the opportunities, responsibilities, and experiences of adult life. Paragraph 2(2)(h).
 - Ensure that students of compulsory school age have adequate preparation for the opportunities, responsibilities, and experiences of adult life. Paragraph 2(2)(j).
 - Provide a planned range of activities that will help students gain an awareness of how they can contribute positively to their local community. Paragraph 5(a)(iii).
 - Ensure that students develop a broad general knowledge of public institutions and services in England. Paragraph 5(a)(iv).
 - Ensure that students have a programme of study that gives them opportunity to learn about fundamental British values, mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs. Paragraph 5(a)(vi).

- Ensure that procedures for safeguarding students have due regard to guidance issued by the Secretary of State, especially regarding the provision of child protection training for staff. Paragraph 7.
- Increase the number of trained first aiders and ensure that the first aid policy has all the information required. Paragraph 14.
- Verify that all staff have not been barred from working with children. Paragraph 19(2)(a).
- Check that all staff have a criminal record check. Paragraph 19(2)(c).
- Ensure that the college can verify, where appropriate, that staff who have lived outside the United Kingdom are suitable to work with children. Paragraph 19(2)(d).
- Ensure that the single central register shows that appropriate checks have been made on all appointed staff after 1 May 2007. Paragraph 22(3).

Inspection judgements

Pupils' achievement

Adequate

Students' achievements are adequate overall. Most gain the qualifications they need to move onto their next chosen steps. A high proportion of students successfully gain access to university courses in the United Kingdom, a key aim of the college.

Students' best achievements are in mathematics, where teaching is more often good. Students practise their speaking and conversational skills effectively in lessons by answering questions, discussing their work and taking part in small-group presentations. In English, students' speaking and listening skills are better developed than writing skills. Students' work in files is not always well presented or orderly and confirms that they are making adequate rather than good progress over time. Achievement in other subjects is adequate overall.

Only a small number of students each year take national examinations. The majority of these students successfully gain passes in a number of courses including GCSE, IGCSE, A level and university foundation programmes. In recent years, the number gaining the highest grades in these examinations has been low overall and inconsistent between subjects. Within this overall judgement, the best performance has been in mathematics, where students have achieved higher grades more consistently. Other subjects where there has been a stronger performance in examinations include economics, law, business studies and accounting. There are no obvious differences in achievement between the different nationalities studying in the college.

Pupils' behaviour and personal development

Inadequate

Students' behaviour and personal development are inadequate overall because students' attendance is low overall, and poor for a minority of students, denying them good continuity of study. There are also weaknesses in the provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, leading to inadequate outcomes for students.

Behaviour in lessons and around the college is mostly good. The college is a calm and welcoming establishment. Students are courteous and polite, and respond appropriately to staff requests. Students from all backgrounds and nationalities, which are very diverse, get on very well in lessons and during break times. Students say they feel safe and do not have concerns about bullying or harassment of any sort. There have been no recorded serious incidents in recent years. Students' attitudes in lessons are mostly good. They willingly undertake their tasks and activities, though sometimes lose interest when they are not sufficiently challenged.

Pupils have raised money for national charities but there is not an established and well-planned programme of personal, social and health education (PSHE) to adequately promote personal development. Some discussions on various topics take place in tutorial sessions and in personal, social and health education lessons but the lack of planning has led to students having an inadequate, ad hoc, and patchy development of personal skills and knowledge of cultures, faiths, public services and institutions. One exception is when students who choose to follow political studies learn about democracy and government as part of their courses.

There are currently no organised opportunities for students to take particular responsibilities within the college. There is very limited planned involvement in the local and wider community, although students organise a little themselves in their own time, for example belonging to local sports clubs. A range of visits to places of interest and events are suggested and planned by college staff from time to time, but involvement is by students' own choice and usually involves additional expense. Take-up is often low.

Quality of teaching**Adequate**

The overall quality of teaching is adequate, and some is good. No teaching observed was inadequate. Teachers have good relationships with students. Lessons run smoothly. Teachers have good subject knowledge and teach confidently. They are very aware of the syllabuses that students are following and plan lessons accordingly to meet the demands of the examinations that students take.

The best lessons have challenge and energy. Where this happens, learning moves on at a good pace, even in those where there is only one student. In one lesson, for example, the teacher and sole student had a lively debate about democracy, rights and responsibilities. In a mathematics lesson, learning was brisk. Students were appropriately challenged to complete a certain amount of work on cumulative frequency. The teacher gave clear instructions about what should be achieved by the end of the session. All teachers are aware that students speak English as an additional language. They take time to explain vocabulary and check understanding, and this helps students to learn better.

Teachers are aware of the different abilities of their students, but even with this knowledge, the work is not always challenging enough to maintain a high level of engagement throughout the lesson for all students, especially the most able. There are missed opportunities to involve students more in lessons by asking them to model and explain their ideas and thoughts in a more engaging and lively way. Therefore, learning is not as brisk as it should be and students make adequate, rather than good, progress. Some students do not receive enough guidance on how to manage their ongoing work, ensuring that it is dated, sequential and in a form to provide a good learning resource for revision. All this has a negative impact on students' achievement.

The quality of teachers' marking is variable. Teachers regularly assess their pupils with tests, but marking is not used consistently to set targets which will help students to gain higher levels of achievement. However, students find individual tutorials and discussions helpful in enabling them to overcome any difficulties with their studies.

Quality of curriculum**Inadequate**

The curriculum is inadequate because it does not cover the range of learning opportunities required by the regulations.

The college has improved its schemes of work since its registration. Courses leading to external examinations are appropriately documented and planned. The college has a particular focus on mathematics, science and business-related studies, though a range of other courses are also offered. The college is flexible in the way it develops individual programmes for students. The English curriculum not only leads to examinations but also helps to broaden students' spoken and conversational skills, covering a wide range of interesting themes. Most students are already sure of what career they hope to follow. They feel that they are well prepared for their next steps from the college, most of which will be to higher education. Students told the inspector that they discussed applications to universities with their tutors and were given helpful advice about writing and improving their curriculum vitae.

However, the curriculum does not provide a broad and well-planned range of study and activity which fully prepares students of all ages for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life. For instance, the college does not yet offer a planned range of activities that will adequately promote the development of students' aesthetic and creative skills. Nor does it provide any formally planned humanities studies other than for those who follow examination courses, and this, together with the absence of a structured PSHE programme, also has an impact, particularly on students of compulsory school age. Physical education is timetabled for younger students but there is not a detailed scheme of work to show how physical skills will be systemically developed or

to show how students can keep themselves fit and healthy.

Pupils' welfare, health and safety

Inadequate

Provision to maintain pupils' welfare, health and safety is inadequate. The college has not yet developed rigorous enough procedures to ensure that it meets all the required independent school standards.

Day-to-day supervision of students is appropriate, and their ongoing welfare is checked and very well managed by the student support officer, who not only keeps in regular personal contact with students, but maintains excellent liaison with host and foster families. Students and families alike have much confidence in this aspect of the college's work. Appropriate checks are undertaken by the college and local authority on host and foster families.

The college has an appropriate range of policy documents, including those for child protection, health and safety, behaviour and anti-bullying, but not all are applied properly and not all cover all that is required. For instance, the college has improved its appointment procedures but it is not rigorous enough in ensuring that it has undertaken all the required checks on staff. Not all the required information is recorded on the single central register. The designated person for child protection has not had the required level of training but is now booked onto an appropriate course in the near future. The college management has not ensured that all other staff have had appropriate child protection training. The first aid policy does not have all the required information. There are insufficient trained first aiders on site to ensure that an appropriate level of first aid cover is maintained at all times. First aid materials are adequate.

Fire safety arrangements meet requirements. A fire risk assessment has been completed, fire appliances are checked and there are regular recorded fire drills. Admission and attendance registers are adequately maintained. General health and safety risk assessments, and those related to the science laboratory and outside visits, are adequate.

Students say they feel safe and do not have any worries about bullying or harassment of any sort. They are content that there is always a member of staff or someone in their host families that they can talk to if they have any concerns about their welfare and safety. Students have the contact information of an 'independent listener' and also national contact numbers such as Childline.

Leadership and management

Inadequate

Leadership and management are inadequate. The college has too many weaknesses. The college has recently changed both premises and leadership, and significant aspects of the college's work have not been adequately managed during this period. Some improvements have recently been made, especially in developing more detailed schemes of work.

Self-evaluation is not rigorous enough. Insufficient attention has been given to checking the quality of provision and establishing a clear, detailed action plan for improvement.

The new premises provide a suite of well-maintained general classrooms and some specialist rooms suitable for safe and effective learning. Pupils taking part in physical education use the specialist facilities, and changing rooms and showers, at a local sports centre. Students have the choice to leave college premises during their break times and may, if they wish, use a nearby park for recreation. The school is actively seeking to develop a rooftop garden to increase the outdoor provision for relaxation.

The college provides all the required information to parents and carers through its prospectus and website. Parents and carers receive regular reports about their children's progress. The complaints procedure complies with requirements.

The proprietor and other leaders of the school have failed to ensure that all the independent school regulations are met.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	A school which provides an exceptional quality of education and significantly exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 2	Good	A school which provides a high quality of education that exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 3	Adequate	A school which meets minimum requirements but needs to improve the quality of education it provides.
Grade 4	Inadequate	A school where minimum requirements are not met and/or the quality of education has serious weaknesses.

School details

Unique reference number	138363
Inspection number	420247
DfE registration number	931/6007

This inspection was carried out 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.

Type of school	Secondary
School status	Independent College
Age range of pupils	13–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	38
Number of part time pupils	None
Proprietor	Dr Roy Carrington
Principal	Dr Roy Carrington
Date of previous school inspection	First Inspection
Annual fees (day pupils)	£12,500 – £14,500
Telephone number	01865 240111
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