

Abbey College Cambridge

17 Station Road, Cambridge, CB1 2JB

Inspection dates

28–30 January 2014

Overall effectiveness

	Overall effectiveness	Outstanding	1
Pupils' achievement	Outstanding	1	1
Pupils' behaviour and personal development	Outstanding	1	1
Quality of teaching	Outstanding	1	1
Quality of curriculum	Outstanding	1	1
Pupils' welfare, health and safety	Outstanding	1	1
Leadership and management	Outstanding	1	1

Summary of key findings

This school is outstanding because

- It is successful in fulfilling its aim of enabling outstanding achievement for all through the provision of a suitably challenging curriculum.
- The quality of teaching is outstanding and enables students to obtain places in a range of British universities.
- Students are highly motivated, hard-working and committed to their academic success.
- The school's leaders and managers have high aspirations for their students and have a strong impact on the quality of teaching and students' achievement.
- The governing body works effectively with the college leaders to ensure excellent monitoring, evaluation and high expectations contribute to continuous improvements in the work of the college.
- Arrangements for the welfare, health and safety of students are outstanding

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets 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.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection was conducted with one day’s notice.
- Inspectors observed 25 lessons taught by 25 teachers. Eight of these were jointly observed with members of the senior leadership team.
- Meetings were held with senior managers, representatives of the governors’ management committee, and a group of students. Additional, informal discussions took place with a number of students and members of staff.
- 17 responses to the online Parent View questionnaire were considered. A range of college documentation was scrutinised, including teachers’ planning, policy documents, health and safety records, risk assessments and examples of students’ work.

Inspection team

David Young, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Sa’ad Khaldi	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Abbey College Cambridge is located on six sites in the centre of Cambridge. It is part of the Alpha Plus Group Ltd, which also operates a number of similar colleges elsewhere in the country.
- The college was registered as an independent school in 2010 and was last inspected by Ofsted in November 2010.
- It provides GCSE and A level courses, together with a university foundation course, for students in the age range 14 to 21 years.
- There are currently 296 students on roll, most of whom are international students from a range of countries including China, Malaysia, Vietnam and Nigeria.
- The college aims to be 'a community energised by the love of learning and the pursuit of outstanding achievement for all'.
- The college provides boarding accommodation for a number of students. The last report on the boarding provision was published by Ofsted in April 2013.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Establish a system of monitoring which enables students to demonstrate the extent and frequency of their wider reading.
- Further develop robust, consultative communication to ensure that the staff understand and implement consistently the College vision and new developments.

Inspection judgements

Pupils' achievement

Outstanding

Students' progress is outstanding and they achieve excellent results in external examinations. Results at GCSE and A level are well above national averages. In 2013, for example, 71% of A level results were graded A or A*. High attainment in external examinations is common across the student body. Students enter the college with levels of attainment which are broadly in line with national expectations for GCSE and A level courses, but most students are not completely secure in their use of the English language. They make outstanding progress in the development of their language and communication as they progress through their courses. The college provides excellent specialist support for the development of English, together with a successful emphasis on the use of spoken and written English across the curriculum. Students make exceptional progress in a range of mathematical and science subjects, enabling many to study these disciplines at university. The recently introduced methods for assessment and recording of attainment and setting targets for improvement for individual students are proving very effective in helping all students, including those with additional needs, to achieve so well. The college fulfils its aims to a high standard.

Pupils' behaviour and personal development

Outstanding

The behaviour and personal development of students are outstanding. They demonstrate exemplary attitudes to learning and engagement in lessons. Students' attendance is excellent; they want to learn, respond well to high levels of challenge and demonstrate high levels of self-motivation. There are excellent relationships between staff and students, characterised by positive encouragement, patience and high expectations. Staff and students demonstrate mutual respect and the college is a harmonious community. There is no evidence of bullying and incidents of unacceptable behaviour are extremely rare. Students, and their parents and carers, state that the college is a safe environment in which students are well cared for. The college makes excellent provision for the welfare of compulsory school-age students, with an effective emphasis on their emotional and social well-being.

The college provides successfully for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students, alongside their academic progress. Cultural diversity is celebrated and respected, for example, through the recent celebration of the Chinese New Year. Students show respect for different faiths and beliefs. There are similar good opportunities to experience key events and activities in British society and to learn about its values, including democracy and liberty, and its laws. Students have access to a wide range of social and sporting activities and local facilities are used regularly, for example for football, fitness, table tennis and dance. Students play an active part in a variety of volunteering activities in the local community. The breadth of opportunity for personal development is illustrated by the provision of events such as spy day, horse riding and 'big questions'. Students are encouraged to read widely in preparation for the social, economic and political demands of subjects to be studied at university. However, college leaders recognise that they do not yet have formal systems for monitoring the extent to which this is happening.

Quality of teaching

Outstanding

The quality of teaching is outstanding and never less than good. This results in excellent achievement by students across the full range of subjects provided. Teachers plan effectively and demonstrate exemplary subject knowledge, together with a good understanding of how young people learn. Many lessons include high quality presentations by teachers, including detailed explanations and challenging analysis of complex concepts. They provide variety in the range of learning activities and students enjoy their lessons. The majority of lessons combine a good balance between oral and visual communication, and students are encouraged to use the English

language continuously in spoken and written tasks. The recent college initiative to prioritise the use of the English language across all subject areas is evident in many lessons. The quality of oral questioning by staff, and the extent of discussion in lessons, make a significant contribution to students' ability to understand and evaluate information and ideas across the full range of subjects. Teachers have high expectations of what students can achieve, together with appropriate awareness of the relative strengths of individual students. Students develop confidence and practise their spoken English through numerous excellent opportunities for research, discussion and presentation to others. The assessment of students' work is appropriately focused on the required examination outcomes, including effective methods for self- and peer-assessment. There is excellent monitoring and checking of students' progress throughout lessons, resulting in well-timed and appropriate interventions by teachers. High quality teaching enables students to achieve considerable success in their external examinations and prepares them well for future experiences of higher education.

Quality of curriculum

Outstanding

The quality of the curriculum is outstanding and well matched to the needs of students in the age range catered for. Students of compulsory school age have sufficient breadth in their studies up to GCSE level, including examination courses in English, mathematics, sciences and information and communication technology (ICT). Additional courses in humanities and off-site physical education, together with suitable themes in personal, social and health education (PSHE), ensure that the requirements of the Key Stage 4 curriculum are fully met. Wide-ranging extra-curricular clubs and activities are provided for all students and they state that these are well attended and enjoyable.

Students studying A level courses are provided with an appropriate range of subjects to match their university entrance requirements. The college specialises in the teaching of mathematics, sciences, economics and business courses and the majority of students study four A levels in their sixth form curriculum. Appropriate decisions are made to reduce some students to a course consisting of three A levels, or to move them on to a specialised foundation course following completion of the first year of sixth form studies. Students are well supported in making these decisions and staff are skilled in helping students identify individual routes to successful university entrance. There are particularly strong opportunities for the development of competency in numeracy due to the nature of the specialist subjects offered. There have also been good developments in promoting the role of language across the curriculum and ensuring that students become increasingly confident in the use of spoken and written English. The college places an appropriate emphasis on the development of high level thinking skills, including analysis, synthesis, evaluation, and the justification of judgements and conclusions. The courses studied provide good preparation for students' next steps in education. The college ensures that all students have access to a balanced educational experience which is tailored to their individual needs and interests.

Pupils' welfare, health and safety

Outstanding

The provision for the welfare, health and safety of students is outstanding and all the regulatory requirements are met. The quality of policies, procedures and routine safety activities is rigorous and robust. The high quality of care provided for students in the college matches the findings of the most recent report on welfare and safety in the boarding provision. The needs of students of compulsory school age are extremely well met. Very good provision for PSHE equips students to be socially responsible. The college ensures a safe environment. Incidents of bullying are rare and procedures for dealing with these are clear. All required safeguarding responsibilities are fulfilled rigorously, including checks on the suitability of staff and the recording of details in a single central register. Staff are trained to the required levels in first aid, fire safety and child protection, including the designated responsible person. The premises and accommodation are maintained in a safe condition and all routine checks on fire safety are completed and recorded within required timescales. The monitoring of attendance, the provision of counselling, arrangements for the

prevention of bullying, and guidance on e-safety are all exemplary. The college is inclusive and welcoming to students from a wide range of cultures and backgrounds.

Leadership and management

Outstanding

The quality of leadership and management is outstanding and the college leaders have ensured that all the independent school regulations are met. The headteacher and senior staff convey a clear vision and sense of purpose. There is a strong commitment by all members of staff to students' well-being and high expectations of what they can achieve. Policy and practice are kept under regular review. The college governors and the college management committee provide a robust system of monitoring and evaluation of the work of the college and hold senior managers to account. Senior managers have a clear understanding of the college's strengths and have identified appropriate aspects for further development and improvement in a well-focused college development plan. They work effectively as a team, strongly supported by middle managers, to ensure that college policies are implemented consistently.

The great majority of staff state that they are proud to be members of the college community and that implementation of policy is consistent. They value the extent of opportunities for individual professional development. A minority of staff state that senior leaders are not sufficiently aware of, or responsive, to staff views. There is a strong focus on improving teaching and learning, and ensuring that all students have access to a high quality curriculum. Effective use is made of a variety of accommodation and advanced plans are in place, subject to planning approval, to move to new, purpose-built accommodation. Parents and carers who responded to the online Parent View questionnaire, express strong support for the college and its achievements. Suitable information is made available for parents and carers through a comprehensive college website, including access to an appropriate complaints procedure.

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	136083
Inspection number	422829
DfE registration number	873/6049

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	International sixth form college
School status	Independent boarding school
Age range of pupils	14–21 years
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	296
Number of part time pupils	0
Proprietor	Alpha Plus Group Ltd.
Chair	Sir John Ritblat
Headteacher	Julian Davies
Date of previous school inspection	16–17 November 2010
Annual fees (Tuition)	£18,000–£23,000
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