

Abbey Manor College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	130856
Local Authority	Lewisham
Inspection number	293644
Inspection dates	25–26 June 2007
Reporting inspector	Sheila Nolan

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Pupil referral unit
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	169
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Jim Mallory
Headteacher	Ms Liz Jones
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	40 Falmouth Close Lee London SE12 8PJ
Telephone number	020 8297 7060
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Age group	11–16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Abbey Manor College, established two years ago after the amalgamation of two local pupil referral units, provides education and support for permanently excluded students as well as for those at serious risk of exclusion. The ethnic make-up of the students reflects the diverse area-wide community although very few are at the early stages of learning English. High numbers of students join or leave the college throughout the school year. All are vulnerable young people and many have involvement with the social services. A third of the students has a statement of special educational need and around a fifth is eligible for a free school meal. The college operates on two sites over two miles apart.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Abbey Manor sets out to give its students a 'fighting chance' to break the cycle of failure in which they have become embroiled. In this it is very effective and it provides a good quality of education for its vulnerable young people. Its greatest success lies in improving personal and social skills, in finding vocational areas to re-engage Years 10 and 11 in learning and in managing the next stages of education, work and training. Through its learning mentors, and for the best part of a year, the college tracks the high proportion of its students who go on to further education so that most complete courses leading to professional qualifications and good work opportunities.

Care, guidance and support are good with outstanding personal guidance. Abbey Manor is an excellent ambassador for its students, working very closely with many external agencies to ensure their safety and security and to find them the help they need. The college knows, however, that its systems for checking and co-ordinating information on students' academic progress need to be strengthened to support the already sound assessment of overall progress. The curriculum is good in Years 10 and 11 and the vocational opportunities match the needs of most students well. The project-based curriculum envisaged for the small number of students in Years 7 to 9, has still to be fully developed. The college has plans to extend it further when only younger, permanently excluded students will be on roll at the beginning of the new academic year.

Students' personal development is good. Their progress in social skills and their growing understanding of moral issues and of responsible citizenship are reflected well in the effective college council, confidently chaired by a senior student. Students are able to listen to each other and make sensible interventions in discussions, for example. They are proud of their roles in acquiring re-cycling bins and in getting identity badges for the college. They agree that they are ready to take responsibility for monitoring the use of some college facilities at break and lunchtimes. Most show an informed understanding of health and safety issues. They are beginning to contribute to the wider community, acting as sports facilitators, for example, in a primary school.

Most students make giant strides in improving their attendance from their points of entry to the college. As their confidence increases and positive relationships with staff develop, they begin to appreciate that learning is important. The cumulative effect of good teaching and learning in the vocational areas, together with at least satisfactory teaching in the key skills, enables students to make good progress overall. Although overall standards remain below average in the key skills of English, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT), students achieve well from their well below average starting points. The college is clear that there is scope to raise expectations of what some students can achieve in key skills and to improve non-specialist teachers' understanding of how students learn best in English, mathematics and ICT.

Leadership and management are good. The inspirational leadership of the headteacher is very well supported by the exceptional teamwork of the senior managers. This collaborative working has enabled staff to manage efficiently the smooth running of the new college and to cope effectively with the ever changing and complex needs of students. The good management committee, led by a very able chair, challenges and supports the college well. The college's

success in its two-year history has demonstrated clearly that it has a strong capacity to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- ensure that the curriculum for Years 7 to 9 is developed rapidly to match the college's vision for its younger students
- raise expectations of what the students can achieve in English, mathematics and ICT and develop teachers' understanding of how students learn best in these areas
- take forward rapidly plans to provide a central data system so that information on students' achievement can be more effectively monitored throughout the college.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Records show that most students come to Abbey Manor with challenging histories of disrupted schooling as well as other complex needs. As a result, students' starting attainment is well below average compared to that typical for their age groups. Standards overall are below average but students achieve well. They achieve exceptionally well within the vocational courses and at least satisfactorily in the key skills areas. Those with complex needs and learning disabilities make good progress because of the individual attention they receive. A small number of younger students spend short periods in the college and this, combined with infrequent checks on their learning and an under-developed curriculum, limits their progress.

The college gives high priority to ensuring that each student is equipped with the necessary tools to access learning. As attendance improves and confidence grows through success in the vocational courses, students gain ground rapidly. Three quarters of students in Years 10 and 11 gained Level 1 accreditation in their chosen fields in the college's first year of operation. From results externally verified so far, more students than in the previous year are set to gain accreditation at Levels 1 and 2. Students are particularly successful at Level 2 in music technology, media, digital publishing and art and design. In English, mathematics and information and communication technology, current students are expected to improve on the 2006 results with over half of Year 11 gaining awards at Level 1 in all three areas.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students' personal development and well-being are good as is their moral and social development. They are generally courteous towards visitors and in their dealings with adults and each other. Their spiritual and cultural development is satisfactory. Students know that staff care and they form warm and trusting relationships. Behaviour in lessons and around the college is generally good. Their adherence to the 'Abbey challenge' increases their self-esteem and makes them feel valued. They know clearly what is expected of them even if they find it difficult to conform at times.

Students clearly enjoy coming to Abbey Manor. Their attendance improves significantly on that in their previous schools. They speak very positively about their courses and are keen to talk about completed work experience. Students are aware of how to stay safe and live healthily even although they do not always choose to do so. Some students make a very positive contribution to the community, landscaping, for example, a garden for nearby elderly residents or preparing a formal dinner for local dignitaries. Students are rightly proud of these

achievements. They participate well in the many activities and clubs that promote physical fitness. They respond well to the strong emphasis on vocational courses and this helps them greatly in developing the attitudes and skills essential for future training and working life.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good. Teaching is consistently good in the vocational areas which constitute a high proportion of the students' timetables. The teaching of key skills is at least satisfactory. Because teachers, including those new to the college and some as yet unqualified, work hard to create a positive learning environment, students mainly enjoy classes and are pleased with their achievements. Excellent working relationships with students, based on teachers' sensitive understanding of their needs, and secure professional knowledge, particularly in the vocational areas, underpin the most successful lessons. In a construction class, for example, students' understanding of processes was enhanced by the emphasis on the correct use of technical vocabulary.

Despite the above good aspects, however, tasks in some key skills lessons are not always well enough matched to the needs of the individual. Worksheets can be routine and stimulating practical activities too few. Expectations of what students can achieve are occasionally too low in some of these classes and for some younger students. Not all teachers, especially when working outside their specialisms, are yet confident in exploring a wide range of learning activities. Nevertheless, because teachers are adept at encouraging students, they persevere with tasks and generally respond well.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum for students in Years 10 and 11 is good. There is an effective emphasis on personal, social and health education and the strong vocational thrust is complemented by tuition in the key skills of communication, application of number and ICT. This meets well the aspirations and needs of the overwhelming majority of the students. The curriculum is enriched further by a range of visits, often linked with students' courses but also of wider interest to broaden their horizons. Favourite experiences include the London galleries to see the work of other artists and theatre visits. Work experience also provides good opportunities for students to visit large and successful businesses in the neighbourhood. The school is currently extending the curriculum for Years 7 to 9 to give it greater diversity.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Students receive good care, guidance and support. Personal guidance is outstanding. Counselling, well-considered individual learning plans, targets and frequent reviews support personal development well. Excellent links with a wide range of agencies, together with the expertise within the college, ensures students receive the physical and mental support they need. The growing expertise of the catering students, for example, is used to good effect to provide hot balanced meals for students on several days of the week. Staff have worked hard to establish a secure and listening environment where students know that there is always somebody to turn to for help. Non-attendance is followed up carefully and incident and restraint records regularly

updated within individual students' files. Parents, too, recognise that their young people are very well cared for. 'I have noticed that my child has developed self-confidence in both learning and behaviour' wrote a parent.

Information on students' attainment and progress against baseline information is recorded at regular intervals. However, the college recognises that these checks are not frequent enough in all areas and that the lack of a central information system to record achievement hinders middle and senior managers' monitoring of progress. Very good careers guidance and support underpins students' successful transition to further education, training and work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The exceptional and determined leadership of the executive headteacher has ensured a very positive direction for this new college. By establishing a curriculum that meets the needs of older students well and by developing an exceptional sense of team work across the two sites, the headteacher has promoted an outstandingly inclusive ethos that allows vulnerable students to thrive. Well-designed training activities support the many new teachers, teaching assistants and learning mentors in the college's drive to promote and sustain effective teaching and learning. These factors underpin the good capacity of the college to improve further.

The headteacher is supported by a strong senior team with high expectations of what teachers and students working collaboratively can achieve. There is a 'can do' ethos across both sites and this is reflected in students' good progress in academic and personal development. Middle leaders are increasingly confident in their roles as they come to grips with promoting the personal welfare and academic success of the students in their care. Nevertheless, there is unevenness in the way middle leaders understand their accountabilities and this is reflected, for example, in the slow implementation of the intended innovative curriculum for Years 7 to 9.

Self-evaluation is accurate and well-integrated into the college cycle, especially at Key Stage 4. The college is set to implement further monitoring and evaluation procedures that will support its work. It recognises clearly the importance of more efficient assessment systems to centralise information on students' progress and acknowledges the need for higher expectations for some students in aspects of the key skills.

The management committee plays a challenging and influential role in the college's development and the local authority provides very good support for the college. Links with parents are strong with regular weekly contacts. The college liaises exceptionally well with a wide range of outside agencies to get the best for its students. It is particularly effective in helping the transition to work or further training and in enabling younger students to return to mainstream schooling.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

5 July 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Abbey Manor College, London, SE12 8PJ

Thank you for welcoming us to Abbey Manor. We enjoyed sharing time with you and seeing how proud you are of your college. We know that both you and your parents appreciate how well staff look after you.

We consider that Abbey Manor is a good college. Those of you in Years 10 and 11 are achieving well because your teachers make sure that courses interest you and lead you to worthwhile jobs in the future. Because of the high level of individual guidance and support, you make really good progress in your personal development. Your attendance improves as do your social skills and the ways in which you begin to assume responsibility for your actions. A high number of you achieve accreditation in your chosen areas because teaching is good and you build on daily small steps in learning.

You generally behave well in class and usually relate well to your teachers and fellow students. Some of you are ready to make additional positive contributions to the college such as assisting in catering to provide healthy and tasty meals for everyone. You mostly know about eating and living healthily although outside of college you do not always manage this. It is good to know that some of you are able to assist elderly residents in landscaping a garden and that you also support sporting activities in a local school.

Your very committed headteacher and staff never stop trying to make Abbey Manor an even better place to be. We have asked them to implement quickly the new Key Stage 3 curriculum so that those in Years 7 to 9 can make faster progress. We would also like to see some of you have opportunities to gain accreditation at Level 2 in English, mathematics and ICT. Besides this, we know the college is planning more rigorous systems to check on your learning and seeking ways to provide ever more training for your teachers.

We hope you will continue to do your best to attend regularly and co-operate with the staff by trying to learn well. We wish you every success in the future.

Sheila Nolan, Lead inspector