

Inspection report
Abbey College Manchester
Independent school
DfES ref no: 352/6044

Inspection under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002

Dates of inspection: 27 – 28 September 2006

Introduction

Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by the Office for Standards in Education under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002 as part of pilot inspection arrangements in order to advise the Secretary of State for Education and Skills about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Information about the school

Abbey College Manchester is a co-educational day college situated in city centre Manchester. It was founded in 1990 and moved to the current location in September 2003. The college takes in students of a wide range of ability from Greater Manchester and from around the world. The college's philosophy involves providing students with a framework of support while encouraging students to take responsibility for their own learning. Students are able to follow courses in a range of subjects at General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) and Advanced Level General Certificate of Education (GCE).

Overall evaluation of the school

The college's curriculum is good and is guided by a clear curriculum policy. The range of curriculum experiences available to students of compulsory school age meets registration requirements, and there is a good range of subject choices available to post-16 students. If the college is unable to provide a particular course, staff try to make arrangements for the subject to be learnt elsewhere. All students, therefore, have access to an appropriate curriculum and good opportunities to make progress. Although there are no on-site facilities for physical education, the college has the use of nearby University and club facilities. While science is a traditional strength of the College the curriculum has expanded to offer 22 subjects at Advanced Level GCE. There are effective schemes of work, and one section of the development plan sets out clearly the college's objectives for improvement of the curriculum, and many of them have been successfully met. These include provision for students with special educational needs, those with English as an additional language, and careers advice. There is a good programme of personal, social and health education (PSHE), and extra-curricular activity in sport, voluntary work and societies.

Teaching and learning are good with some outstanding features. Teaching is based on good planning, effective use of resources, and good relationships. The very best teaching fully engages the enthusiasm of students, who are motivated to seek clarification on particular points and readily pursue research tasks to find out more. Through a combination of an excellent command of the subject and very good communication skills, the teacher inspires students to present coherent cases in support of their views, and to participate fully in a rich learning experience. In all

lessons seen, students and teachers work effectively together to make good progress. Many students are making good progress throughout their courses, with their achievement shown in relation to their prior attainment. The College uses frequent assessment in conjunction with newly introduced baseline test data to monitor the progress of students. In the light of these assessment data teachers provide appropriate teaching and learning to students who join the college with a wide range of previous learning experiences. Teachers work hard and have very good subject knowledge and enthusiasm which contributes significantly to students' learning. Teachers hold the learning of all students as important, and in practice there is no evidence of individuals or groups receiving differential attention due to gender, ethnicity, attainment or faith.

In class and in discussion students give strong evidence of enjoying their education. While they acknowledge the work is demanding, and some describe the hours as too long, they clearly appreciate the efforts teachers make to help them achieve their goals. All students interviewed rated their education as at least good and several thought it outstanding and could not suggest any improvements. Key elements in the programme of students, particularly PSHE and sixth form year group meetings, provide students with the information they need to live as independent adults and successful members of society. Students are helped to develop in ways that promote their achievement of economic well-being; matters of finance, money management, student finances are well covered in courses of PSHE and in year group meetings. Students can participate in the student council and discuss issues involved in college life. For example, the student council engaged in considering healthy eating, and they have produced a consumer guide to the area's food outlets. The outcomes of their deliberations involve promoting the healthy options and displaying their findings in the students' common room. They organise and run events to raise funds for charity and currently they are supporting three charities associated with the care of children and young people. Students take on the role of supporting peers and the smooth working of the college and special events. Students participate strongly in such activities as Young Enterprise, and Millennium Volunteers. They operate in a self-confident and self-disciplined way, and behaviour throughout the inspection was exemplary. The college is redolent of mutual respect with no raised voices but rather positive exchanges between students and with teachers. Movements around the college are orderly, self-disciplined, and purposeful. In classrooms and study areas the levels of application are high and sustained. Around the college inspectors only encountered classrooms where students were working well, and in the majority of cases, engaged actively in learning. Walls in the college have significant displays that demonstrate the college's belief in racial and gender equality, anti-bullying, the celebration of different cultures and faiths, and the appreciation of the talents and achievement of a full range of students. The college has generated an ethos of mutual respect for individuals regardless of gender, attainment, ethnicity or faith. The college makes explicit its positive attitudes to all individuals and shows that it values the variety of student.

The college is providing a good, safe environment for learning for all students. Policies on all required aspects for the welfare of students, and health and safety are in place and adhered to. All students rated their view of personal security and safety

as very high. They expressed no doubts about staying safe in the college. Policies are made available to staff through a well structured staff handbook, with the exception of a first aid policy to cover accidents to students in college. There is a separate First Aid policy displayed for the attention of staff in their work room, but it is not on public display for students, nor are the names of First Aiders displayed. The locations of First Aid kits are not well signed, although safety requirements such as those in laboratories are well known and well maintained. The college sets out clear values for behaviour, and stresses appropriately the need for students to be responsible for their work and behaviour. Admissions and attendance registers are kept both in hard copy and on the college's computer system. This provides a secure and accurate account of students' attendance and all information necessary for registration. Students receive good quality information about maintaining a healthy lifestyle, the dangers of poor nutrition and the abuse of substance. Rightly the college stresses the students' responsibility in maintaining their own healthy lifestyle. Courses of study of some subjects, PSHE, and year meetings all have elements of healthy eating, and advice on exercise. Physical education (PE) is compulsory for students in years 10 and 11, although students say they do not have to exercise at the leisure centre but can simply attend. Sixth form students have the opportunity for a physical recreation session on their programme, and have access to gym facilities locally. Their first visit is compulsory to get to know what is available for them. Such physical activity is not compulsory but the college arranges for reduced cost membership of fitness clubs.

Procedures for appointment of staff are clear, secure and comply with requirements. Good management practice has led to all staff having undergone Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks. The principal has now required CRB checks to be made on all staff appointed before her tenure, and these are all either completed or in process. The college is situated in the heart of city centre Manchester. The college opens directly onto a street with no ground associated with the college beyond the building footprint. There is no scope for outside space at all. Sporting activities are undertaken at a nearby leisure/sports centre belonging to the university. The college is in a very well appointed building with high standards of maintenance and decoration. The premises provide very good accommodation that meets requirements for space and student numbers. There is good disabled access, a lift to all of the five floors, no steps, and disabled toilet. The signage for emergency exits is clear and regular fire drills, which are well recorded, help ensure the safety of staff and students. The furniture and fittings are of a high standard, including those in specialist areas such as the science laboratories. The college now provides parents and prospective parents with the information required by regulations. Communication with parents is effective, and materials sent to parents and prospective parents clearly describe the ethos of the college.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The college meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended January 2005, with the exception of those listed below.

The college does not meet all requirements in respect of the suitability of premises and accommodation (standard 5) and must:

- Seek to make appropriate arrangements for providing outside space for students to play safely (paragraph 5(t)).

What the college could do to improve further

Whilst not required by the regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development:

- To ensure that the First Aid policy is made available to staff in the staff handbook, and be displayed for students to understand their role in First Aid provision; and
- To improve the signage to show the locations of all First Aid kits.

School details

Name of school:	Abbey College Manchester
DfES Number:	352/6044
Type of school:	GCSE and Sixth Form College
Status:	Independent
Date school opened:	1990
Age range of students:	14 – 19
Gender of students:	Mixed
Number on roll :	Boys: 108 Girls: 53 Total: 161
Annual fees (day students):	£8,100 – £13,890
Address of school:	5 – 7 Cheapside Off King Street Manchester M2 4WG
Telephone number:	0161 817 2700
Fax number:	0161 817 2705
Email address:	admin@abbeymanchester.co.uk
Headteacher:	Mrs Jenny Thomas
Proprietor:	Alpha Plus Group
Reporting Inspector:	Ian Richardson HMI
Dates of inspection:	27 – 28 September 2007

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