



Acorn Independent College

Independent Tutorial College

Inspection report

DfES Registration Number	307/6081
Unique Reference Number	131982
Inspection number	301330
Inspection dates	20-21 March 2007
Reporting inspector	Michael Thirkell AI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002 (as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005).

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, 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 college

Acorn Independent college was established in Southall on its present site in 1999. The college is privately owned and led by the principal. It currently provides education for male and female students, the majority of whom are between aged 14 to 20 years and of Asian heritage. There are currently 144 students on roll, most living relatively locally. There are no students with a statement of special educational need, although a minority of them have particular learning needs which are identified by the college. The aim of the college is *'to help each of its students, by offering sound advice and applying the highest educational standards, to achieve the very best of which he or she is capable'*. The college is accredited by the British Accreditation Council for Independent Further and Higher education (BAC) and was last inspected by them in March, 2004.

Evaluation of the college

This is a good college where students achieve high academic standards and which has maintained outstanding examination results at all levels over a number of years. The college is successful at meeting its aims for students' achievement because teaching is effective. Students are known well and supported individually by the college staff. Relationships and behaviour are outstanding. The college cares well for its students' personal development as well as their academic success, but has yet to fully develop welfare policies.

Quality of education

The curriculum provision is good and has a number of strengths. It is appropriately designed to provide effective support for all students currently attending the college, including a minority identified by the college as having particular learning needs. Most follow two year academic courses leading to the GCSE and to examinations at advanced level (AS and A2). This year, there are 14 older students taking shortened one year advanced level examination courses. Intensive one term courses are offered to students who wish to retake public examinations at advanced level. The college will admit students into Key Stage 3, but currently none are taking courses at this level. Records maintained by the college show that students of all abilities make outstanding progress.

They demonstrate that examination results have been consistently high for a number of years at both GCSE and advanced levels.

The curriculum provides students with a wide range of learning experiences and opportunities. In Key Stage 4 (KS4) students follow a course of at least eight subjects, although in practice most take more, in addition to physical education (PE), held at a local leisure centre, and personal social and health education (PSHE). All these students study English language, mathematics, biology, chemistry and physics. In addition, they can choose at least one subject from information communication technology (ICT), art, history, English literature, French, German and Spanish. A number of students arrive at the college having experienced low academic achievement. The college takes care to identify their particular needs and works hard to *'unlock their potential'*. The provision of three timetabled hours for each subject is helpful in this respect.

The vast majority of advanced level students follow a two year course and come straight from GCSE. A suitably wide range of subjects is offered to these older students. Most of them study four subjects in their first year to AS level and three to A2 in the second year. Very able students may be allowed to take additional subjects.

Although the curriculum for students in KS4 is good in most respects there is no provision for citizenship and there is no programme for careers education. Whilst there are good examples of extra-curricular activities, such as the art department's trips to Paris and Amsterdam, the college needs to consider how the range of activities offered could be developed further. A significant number of questionnaires returned by students and parents prior to the inspection confirm this view.

The quality of teaching is outstanding and this has a significant impact on the high level of success achieved by students in GCSE and advanced level examinations. In the lessons seen during the inspection teaching was never less than good. A high proportion of the good lessons seen contained outstanding features. Teachers have very good specialist knowledge and are enthusiastic about their subjects. They plan lessons well and are systematic in their approach to promoting learning. They demonstrate a thorough knowledge of examination content and guide students to developing the necessary study skills to succeed. Lessons are conducted at a good pace and teachers show suitably high expectations of what students can achieve. Staff engage students in discussions and encourage them to express their views through effective questioning. Questioning is used well by teachers both to challenge students to think independently, to confirm their understanding and to encourage those who show less confidence in their response. As a result of effective questioning and discussion, student's intellectual development is well supported. Learning is reinforced through the provision of regular homework. Individual support and extra tuition is generously provided by staff for students. Whilst there are

sufficient resources to support teaching and learning, the computers used for ICT are nearing the end of their useful life.

Assessment practice is good and teachers demonstrate a good knowledge of their students' capabilities, including any particular learning needs that they may have. Marking is regular, and verbal and written feedback to students is effective. As a result of careful and regular monitoring and marking by teachers, notes taken by students of all ages during lessons are consistently well presented, which facilitates their use for revision. Testing is very regular and students become familiar with the nature of questions through the carefully structured use of past examination papers. Good records are maintained by teachers of each student's progress and reports to parents provided on three occasions during the academic year.

Students' behaviour is outstanding both in lessons and around the college, and most show enjoyment in learning. The positive learning atmosphere in lessons provides a significant support to the effective teaching and rate of learning. Students generally show a strong motivation to learn. This encourages those whose experience of learning has previously been less positive.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the students

The quality of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory overall and contains a number of important strengths. Students enjoy their education because teaching is of high quality. Attendance rates are good and students' behaviour outstanding. They trust their teachers, who work hard on their behalf. They develop a good understanding and awareness of the world around them. For example, students studying art show a remarkably high level of the sensitivity to colour and form. Students' sketchbooks from all levels demonstrate sumptuous as well as informed use of colour. The college is aware of students' wider spiritual needs and makes special provision for them, where appropriate, to worship according to their religious beliefs.

The college effectively raises students' self-esteem because it provides effective support for them to make progress. This is a strong feature of students' good preparation for adult life. Younger students refer to how much academic progress they have made since coming to the college. The positive relationships seen in lessons and around the college, between staff and students and between students, ensure a positive learning environment. Students clearly show that they know right from wrong. This is supported by aspects of the PSHE provision for younger students and illustrated by their positive conduct. A number of students make a positive contribution to the community by helping elderly people. Although there are some positive aspects in students' cultural development, including an effective development of an understanding of

English literature, supported by visits to the theatre, this provision is underdeveloped.

Welfare, health and safety of the students

The welfare and support of the students is central to the college's aims. It cares satisfactorily for its students in practice, but needs to review and up-date some aspects of its policies and their implementation, in particular with regard to child protection, including the required staff awareness training. The college should act urgently to provide a policy relating to the safety of students on activities away from the college. It has already begun to address these issues. Although students' attitudes are usually very positive, clear policies are in place for dealing with any incidents should they occur. Students feel safe and enjoy working in a positive and orderly environment. The PSHE programme deals effectively with the range of issues required for younger students, in particular in relation to the misuse of drugs. The college meets the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act (2002).

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The college has established procedures for undertaking appropriate checks of new staff with the Criminal Record Bureau to confirm their suitability to work with young people. Records are maintained clearly in the prescribed manner. Despite this not all checks on staff have been completed. The college is already in the process of remedying this situation which relates to one outstanding check only.

College's premises and accommodation

The college is housed in a converted office block which meets requirements in most respects. Most classrooms are of suitable size for their current use and there are three specialist laboratories for science, and further rooms exclusively for art and ICT. The popularity of science courses leads, on occasions, to some strain on these facilities. Although there is no outside recreational space for younger students at break and lunch time, there are separate common rooms for both GCSE and advanced level students. If in the future the college accepts KS3 students it will need to develop external facilities for play. The facilities currently provided for students who might become ill are inadequate as the room does not have a hand basin.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The college has generally good procedures for communicating with parents. Most of the required information is provided for parents and others, or they are informed that it is available from the college. However, there are one or two

omissions. For example, they are not made aware of the availability of the policies on bullying and child protection. The college is aware of these oversights and is already in the process of ensuring that the requirement is fully implemented.

Procedures for handling complaints

There are suitable procedures for handling complaints.

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 curriculum (standard 1) and must:

- provide a course in careers education for students of compulsory school age (paragraph 1(2)(g)).

The college does not meet all requirements in respect of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (standard 2) and must:

- improve students' knowledge and understanding of public institutions and services by providing a programme of citizenship for those of compulsory school age (paragraph 2(d)).

The college does not meet all requirements in respect of provision for students' welfare, health and safety (standard 3) and must:

- undertake a careful review of policies for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of students in compliance with the latest DfES guidance *Safeguarding children and safer recruitment in education* (paragraph 3(2)(b))
- prepare and implement a written policy relating to the health and safety of pupils on activities outside the school which has regard to DfES guidance *Health and safety of pupils on educational visits* (paragraph 3(2)(c)).

The college does not meet all requirements in respect of suitability of proprietor and staff (standard 4) and must:

- prior to the confirmation of the appointment of all staff ensure that they have been subject to a check with the Criminal Records Bureau to confirm their suitability to work with children (paragraph 4(b)).

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

- provide appropriate facilities for students who are ill (paragraph 5(l)).

The college does not meet all requirements in respect of the provision of information for parents, carers and others (standard 6) and must:

- ensure that parents are aware they can request particulars of policies relating to bullying, child protection, health and safety, the promotion of good behaviour, and sanctions adopted in the event of pupils misbehaving (paragraph 6(2)(h)).

What the college could do to improve further

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

- as the prospectus refers to provision for Key Stage 3 students, although there are currently none on roll, the college should review how the provision, will need to be developed further to provide for this age group, in particular the external facilities for play.

School details

Name of college	Acorn Independent College
DfES number	307/6081
Unique reference number	131982
Type of college	Tutorial
Status	Independent
Date college opened	1999
Age range of students	14- 19
Gender of students	Mixed
Number on roll (full-time students)	Boys: 90 Girls: 54 Total: 144
Annual fees (day students)	£8030 - £12360 p.a.
Address of college	39-47 High Street Southall Middlesex UB1 3HF
Telephone number	0208 571 9900
Fax number	0208 571 9901
Email address	acorncollege@hotmail.co.uk
Principal	Mrs G Watt
Proprietor	Mrs Gladys Watt and Mr Graham Watt
Reporting inspector	Mike Thirkell AI
Dates of inspection	20-21 March 2007