

# Ashbourne College

Independent School

Inspection report

DCSF registration number	207/6348
Unique reference number	100537
Inspection number	316889
Inspection dates	15-16 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Sheila Nolan AI

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

The inspection of the school 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 Children, Schools and Families about the college's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

## Information about the college

Ashbourne College was founded in 1981 as a co-educational tutorial establishment specialising in pre-university education, particularly in mathematics, science and economics. Currently, the college offers a wide range of A-level and GCSE courses in small groups for those trying to improve previous examination grades as well as for those studying subjects for the first time. There are a small number of students of compulsory school age following pre-GCSE and GCSE courses. The college serves both home-based and international students who wish to attain good grades to gain entry to higher education. There are currently 155 students on roll, aged from 13 to 20. The college aims explicitly to promote high academic standards and develop students' independent approach to study. The college, fully accredited by the Council of International schools, is located on two near-by sites in west London.

## Evaluation of the college

Ashbourne College provides a good quality of education and care and fulfils its intentions well. The quality of teaching is good and students make good progress in their chosen courses. The majority of students achieve their personal goals of entry into higher education and to the universities of their choice. Students demonstrate very positive attitudes to learning, supported by the careful monitoring of their progress and by the good individual attention they receive. The provision for students' welfare, health and safety is also good.

## Quality of education

The quality of education is good, underpinned by a good curriculum that matches the aspirations of the students well. Small groups, a high level of individual attention, and a wide range of A-level courses enable students to access university places successfully. This is Ashbourne's strength. Courses are well supported by schemes of work that correspond very closely with examination specifications. Students in Years 10 and 11 mostly follow GCSE programmes that are balanced to include English and mathematics. They also have opportunities to follow accelerated courses leading to advanced accreditation. Course starting points are timed appropriately to match the needs of the many overseas students.

Students benefit from a range of additional activities. Particularly effective is the provision for post-16 students for whom English is an additional language. For students in the middle school this is less well developed, although there are plans to better match English language support to younger students' needs. There is a well-considered tutorial programme that provides careers education targeted at university entrance. School-age students follow a personal, social and health education programme that matches their needs well. A satisfactory range of enrichment opportunities includes European journeys as well as cultural outings and sport. The physical education programme for Years 10 and 11, however, is not compulsory and thus not all students participate as required. Provision for students with statements of special educational need is good and based on detailed external diagnosis of how to support their progress.

The quality of teaching is good and results in good progress for the overwhelming majority of the students. Staff foster very positive relationships in lessons and students respond well to the scholarly ethos of the classrooms. Teaching is knowledgeable and systematic and pays close attention to the demands of examination specifications. In the best lessons, a lively and encouraging style makes it easy for students to join in, as in an English lesson exploring a text and in a mathematics lesson where Year 12 students were eager to share their solutions to problems. Skilful questioning, careful marking of individual work and self and peer assessments demonstrate to students how their current attainment matches up to examination grades. Time is used effectively so that students cover ground rapidly. This, together with their high motivation to succeed, ensures that A-level students achieve excellent examination outcomes.

Despite these strong features, in some lessons there is too little variety in the activities offered to students. Some teaching does not take into account the language needs of some students and the lack of information and communication technology (ICT) resources restricts teachers' modelling of concepts in a number of subjects. Careless presentation of board work is a common feature across a number of classes.

Assessment is good. Besides the rigorous marking of homework, the college sets formal assessment tasks very regularly. These assessments reflect the examination requirements towards which students are working. They are very effective in ensuring that students appreciate what is required to reach high standards and how well they match up to the criteria. As a result, the great majority of students progress rapidly and reach well above average standards in A2 examinations. Students for whom English is an additional language also have good opportunities to demonstrate their progress in written and spoken English.

## Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the students

The college makes good overall provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Students' behaviour and social development are outstanding. Students are very well mannered, welcoming to guests, behave considerately towards each other and show exceptionally positive attitudes to learning. They enjoy college, attend very regularly, and are generally punctual to lessons. Relationships between students and teachers are very good. A high proportion of the students come from overseas. They are keen to celebrate each others' cultures and share their wide range of traditions.

Compulsory school-age students have good opportunities to explore traditions and organisations within the United Kingdom, such as its public services and institutions, as well as joining older students in furthering their interest and understanding of global issues. The college organises trips and activities so that students can experience local and European culture. There are some opportunities to study faiths other than their own but these are not extensive. Nonetheless, these serve to strengthen the tolerance and racial harmony evident in the college. Students are fully involved in organising social events and have tutorial opportunities to make their views known on college matters that affect them. The college prepares them effectively for their future lives and economic well-being.

## Welfare, health and safety of the students

Provision for students' welfare, health and safety is good. Students speak warmly of the high level of care they receive and how the welfare system in the college covers all their needs. They feel safe and secure and clearly enjoy the rich mixture of cultures and nationalities they encounter as well as the good teaching and the organised events. The Christmas review and fashion show is a clear favourite. Most speak positively of their accommodation, either in independent living or with host families. The health and social education programme provides good opportunities to address younger students' concerns and to engage them in consideration of the issues relating to living healthily. However, despite programmed opportunities for physical activity, not all of Year 10 and 11 choose to participate and some students take too little exercise within the college day. Students are responsible for their own nutrition both within and outside of college.

There are good practices for health and safety related to accidents and emergencies. Fire precautions, fire risk assessments and the marking of registers take place in line with the regulations. Students of compulsory school age are supervised effectively both in lessons and at breaks. Clear policies on health and safety are regularly updated but not all permanent staff have participated in recent training in child protection matters. The college has good disabled access, with lifts on both sites, and has advanced plans to improve toilet facilities for disabled students.

## Suitability of the proprietor and staff

Procedures for staff checks with the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) are carried out systematically and records are mostly up-to-date. Nevertheless, appointed staff are not always subject to the required qualification and medical checks, or additional checks for overseas staff. The college also carries out checks with the CRB for families hosting students during their stay at the college.

## College's premises and accommodation

The quality of the premises and accommodation is good. The buildings are well maintained and are decorated in bright attractive colours. Some teaching areas are small but are adequate for the size of groups taught. Rooms are well ventilated and lit, and are generally conducive to learning. Science is resourced well for A-level work. Although the college has a well-equipped ICT suite and there are some computers available in other parts of the college, there are too few to allow students ready access. ICT resources are not readily available in classrooms to support students' learning. Otherwise, furniture is fit for purpose and there are sufficient washrooms for the use of students and staff. The college has no medical room but arrangements for students taken ill are managed sympathetically and effectively. The college lacks on-site play areas but is adjacent to local parks to which the students have access.

## Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The prospectus and handbooks for parents and students contain much detailed information that generally complies with current regulations. However, the information for parents does not make explicit that the complaints procedure is readily available if required. Regular reports identify students' progress and likely grades as well as indicating their application to their work. The college does not provide a statement of income and expenditure to the one local authority funding a students' placement.

Responses to the parents' pre-inspection questionnaires were few because of their international locations. Those returned recorded satisfaction with information on students' progress and with contacts with the college.

## Procedures for handling complaints

The college's complaints procedures meet all the requirements for registration. The procedures are clear and are understood by the college community.

## 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:

- ensure that students of compulsory school age participate in regular physical activity (paragraph 1(2)(a)(ii)).

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

- implement up-dated training on child protection issues for all permanent staff (paragraph 3(2)(b)).

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

- ensure that medical fitness and qualification checks are made when employing staff (paragraph 4(2)(a))
- ensure any necessary additional checks on overseas staff are carried out (paragraph 4(2)(c))
- complete the record of those enhanced CRB checks still outstanding (paragraph 4C(2 and 3)).

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

- make better use of adjacent public spaces for students of compulsory school age at breaks given the absence of on-site play areas (paragraph 5(t)).

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 that they can request the complaints procedures (paragraph 6(2)(j))
- provide records of annual income and expenditure in relation to students funded by a local authority (paragraph 6(7)).

## What the college could do to improve further

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

- encourage a greater variety of teaching methods in some subject areas and provide further ICT resources in classrooms to support teachers' presentations and students' understanding
- record and follow-up students' participation in optional sports
- ensure that all Year 10 and 11 students for whom English is an additional language have access to the necessary support.



## College details

Name of school	Ashbourne College		
DCSF number	207/6348		
Unique reference number	100537		
Type of college	Sixth Form College		
Status	Independent		
Date college opened	1981		
Age range of students	13-20		
Gender of students	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time students)	Male: 82	Female: 73	Total: 155
Number of students with a statement of special educational need	Male: 1	Girls: 0	Total: 1
Annual fees (day students)	£15,000-£16,500		
Address of school	17 Old Court Place Kensington London W8 4PL		
Telephone number	020 7937 3858		
Fax number	020 7937 2207		
Email address	admin@ashbournecollege.co.uk		
Principal	Mr Michael Kirby		
Proprietor	Mr Michael Kirby		
Reporting inspector	Sheila Nolan AI		
Dates of inspection	15-16 November 2007		