

Abbey College

Independent school inspection report

DCSF registration number	330/6092
Unique Reference Number (URN)	103599
Inspection number	348808
Inspection dates	11–12 May 2010
Reporting inspector	Marian Harker HMI

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under Section 162A¹ of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005², the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Information about the college

Abbey College is an independent college for male and female students aged 14 to 19. It opened in 1992 and is located in a modern building near to Birmingham city centre. The college aims to 'help every one of our students fulfil their potential. By helping them to achieve the academic standards, self-confidence and maturity which they will need to secure a place at their chosen university'. There are currently 138 students on roll, including 53 from overseas. No students have a statement of special educational needs. The college was last inspected in September 2007.

Evaluation of the college

Abbey College provides a good quality of education for its students. It is particularly successful in achieving its aim 'to help every one of our students to fulfil their potential.' The provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural education has improved since the last inspection and is now outstanding. Behaviour is also outstanding; students value being treated as equals and appreciate the high levels of support they receive. The school meets all of the requirements for registration, including those not met at the previous inspection. Safeguarding requirements are met and the welfare, health and safety of the pupils are good.

Quality of education

The quality of the curriculum is good. Students make consistently good progress and some make outstanding progress, particularly in mathematics, chemistry and English. This is due in part to the recent improvements in the leadership and management of the college. Departmental lines of accountability are clear and a robust appraisal system has been introduced. Self-evaluation is accurate overall but is sometimes a little modest.

The curriculum has improved since the last inspection. It enables students to make the progress they do. The broad curriculum includes a wide range of GCSE and A level subjects as well as good provision for personal, social and health education (PSHE). A suitable range of sporting and outdoor activities are provided off the college premises. Students are prepared very well for the next steps in their learning,

¹ www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2002/ukpga_20020032_en_14#pt10-ch1-pb4-l1g162

² www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2005/ukpga_20050018_en_15#sch8

particularly those applying to university. Advice and guidance for the world of work is also well structured. Students attain a good range of academic qualifications, often at a high level. Provision for information, communication and technology (ICT) has improved since the last inspection and is now good. Students from overseas who do not speak English as their first language are well supported by the curriculum. Extra English lessons and small class sizes ensure these students make good progress in acquiring the skills they need to access exam courses. Curriculum plans and schemes of work are well structured, but are not always sufficiently detailed. For example, they do not show plans to challenge the most able as well as to support those with special educational needs and/or disabilities or those whose first language is not English.

Teaching and assessment are good and students make good progress. This is because teachers know their students very well and lessons are carefully planned to meet individual needs. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and are able to skilfully guide students. In lessons, teachers make good use of a range of challenging activities. On occasions, teachers talk too much in lessons and opportunities are sometimes missed to encourage students to work collaboratively or to reflect on their learning. In the best lessons observed, students were motivated by the infectious enthusiasm of the teacher, the pace of learning was brisk and students were given clear guidance how to improve their work. Students are keen to learn, have positive attitudes in lessons and get on very well with their teachers. All staff have consistently high expectations of behaviour and consequently students behave exceptionally well in lessons and around the college. Students work is regularly marked. In the best examples students are guided how to improve their work, but this is not consistent across all subjects. In mathematics, students are provided with worked examples of problems. Students report they find these very useful when checking their own work and this has had a positive impact on students' progress in mathematics.

When joining the college students undergo a thorough assessment and induction process, which includes testing basic skills and a parental meeting for all students, including those from overseas. As a result, the college has a very good understanding of each student's abilities and interests. Each student is regularly assessed in each subject and set clear targets for improvement. Progress is carefully monitored and underachievement quickly identified and action taken. Assessment records are robust, but do not clearly indicate the amount of progress made by individuals or groups of students.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the students

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the students is outstanding. Students' moral and social development is a notable feature of the college. Students have a very clear understanding of right and wrong, they respect the staff and each other. Behaviour is outstanding. Personal development is a significant strength because teachers are such positive role models and successfully nurture the

individual qualities of each student through praise, encouragement and high quality support. One parent commented, 'the staff have instilled a belief in my son that anything is possible with hard work and application'. Students are proud of their college and their achievements. They have extremely positive attitudes to their work and report their appreciation of the high quality advice and guidance they receive from staff. Social skills are effectively developed, resulting in polite, considerate and articulate young people. Students have regular opportunities to contribute to the life of the college. The student council reported that they were proud of their work in improving their common room, although there remains some light hearted disagreement about the final colour that the walls were painted. Students enjoy their lessons and, as a result, attendance is good. The wide range of students who attend the college from all over the world get on well together and the college effectively promotes tolerance and harmony. Students have the opportunity to share their culture and beliefs with others during tutor sessions. The college regularly organises cultural events, including a recent 'wear red day' when students learnt about Chinese New Year. The PSHE curriculum provides students with a good knowledge and understanding of local and national services. Overseas students also report they have enjoyed learning about local customs from their peers.

Welfare, health and safety of the students

The welfare, health and safety of the students are good. Small class sizes and high staffing levels mean that students are well supervised and receive good individual attention during the day. Staff recruitment procedures follow government guidelines and all staff have undergone enhanced checks with the Criminal Records Bureau to confirm their suitability to work with young people. Appropriate attention is given to health and safety, through routine fire evacuations and first aid provision. Although all regulations have been met, some policies are in need of updating and have not yet been shared with all members of the college community. For example, although recent training has taken place, the latest fire safety policy has not been included in the staff and student handbooks. Staff have received appropriate training in safeguarding and the designated person has been trained to the required standard. Students report that they feel safe and any concerns are quickly dealt with by staff. Parents, too, report that they appreciate the safe, caring environment provided by the college. The college effectively promotes healthy living and eating, and most students report that they are keen to achieve a healthy lifestyle. The college has planned well to increase accessibility and will be drawing up a further plan to review the possibility of further improving access.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The college complies fully with the regulations in respect of the checks made on prospective employees with regard to their identity and suitability to work with children and young people. All recruitment and vetting checks are recorded appropriately in the college's single central register.

College's premises and accommodation

The college provides a calm, safe and caring environment that enables students to achieve their ambitions. It is located in a modern building that was originally constructed as architect offices. The premises have been recently modernised to provide appropriate internal teaching areas. The accommodation comprises of two specialist science laboratories, a recently refurbished ICT suite, a common room for students, a specialist art room, a range of classrooms and administrative offices. There is no outdoor area for students on site. However, the college makes appropriate arrangements for students to use local recreation and sports facilities.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The college has established good links with parents, particularly those from overseas students. Parents are kept well informed about their child's progress through regular written reports and informal meetings. These reports are a helpful summary of progress in the key areas of study undertaken by each student. The prospectus and parent handbook have been updated and fully meet requirements.

Procedures for handling complaints

The college has a clearly written and fair complaints procedure which meets the requirements.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended ('the Regulations').

What the college could do to improve further

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

- develop schemes of work so that clear provision is made for students of all abilities, including those who do not speak English as their first language
- provide more planned opportunities for students to develop their skills as independent, creative thinkers and learners through providing regular opportunities for them to work together

- ensure assessment information clearly indicates progress made by individuals and groups of students.

Inspection judgement recording form

outstanding	good	satisfactory	inadequate
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The quality of education

Overall quality of education		✓		
How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of students		✓		
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of pupils' students		✓		
How well students make progress in their learning		✓		

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Quality of provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	✓			
The behaviour of students	✓			

Welfare, health and safety of students

The overall welfare, health and safety of students		✓		
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College details

Name of college	Abbey College		
DCSF number	330/6092		
Unique reference number (URN)	103599		
Type of college	Tutorial College		
Status	Independent		
Date college opened	September 1992		
Age range of students	14–19		
Gender of students	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time students)	Male: 70	Female: 43	Total: 113
Number on roll (part-time students)	Male: 12	Female: 13	Total: 25
Number of students with a statement of special educational need	Male: 0	Female: 0	Total: 0
Annual fees (day students)	£12,300		
Address of school	10 St Paul's Square Birmingham West Midlands B3 1QU		
Telephone number	0121 236 7474		
Fax number	0121 236 3937		
Email address	adminbir@abbeybirmingham.co.uk		
Headteacher	Andrew Jedras		
Proprietor	Alpha Plus Group Ltd		
Reporting inspector	Marian Harker		
Dates of inspection	11–12 May 2010		