

Abbey College Cambridge

17 Station Road, Cambridge, Cambridgeshire CB1 2JB

### Inspection dates

11/10/2016 to 13/10/2016

### The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

**Outstanding** **1**

The quality of care and support

Outstanding 1

How well children and young people are protected

Good 2

The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers

Outstanding 1

### Summary of key findings

#### The boarding provision is outstanding because

- The impact of the boarding experience complements and supports academic attainment and personal and social development exceptionally well. Young people thrive at the school.
- The school keeps young people extremely safe. Supervision of young people is very good.
- The reporting and management of safeguarding concerns and allegations is robust and demonstrates good practice.
- The accommodation is purpose built, bespoke and of an exceptional standard.
- The menu combines international cuisine, offering healthy, appetising options at all meals.
- The staff team is highly professional and is dedicated to making the boarding experience supportive and beneficial.
- Young people's behaviour is exceptionally good. There are no incidents of bullying and the general atmosphere is calm and harmonious.
- Monitoring of some aspects of the boarding provision is identified as an area to improve further.

## **Compliance with the national minimum standards for boarding schools**

The school meets the national minimum standards for boarding schools

## **What does the school need to do to improve further?**

- Ensure that the monitoring and oversight of health, safety and recruitment records are robust and routinely inspected.

## Information about this inspection

The welfare inspection of the three boarding sites was undertaken by three inspectors following a notice period of three hours. The inspection activities included: meeting with the senior leadership team, the catering staff, head of boarding, boarding staff, the safeguarding governor, children and young people; scrutiny of policies and the electronic record base; observation of mealtime activities and evening routines. Parents gave feedback directly to inspectors through Ofsted Parent View and four agents were contacted by telephone.

## Inspection team

Deirdra Keating	Lead social care inspector
Fiona Littlefield	Social care inspector
Trish Palmer	Social care inspector

## **Full Report**

### **Information about this school**

Abbey College is an independent boarding school for pupils aged 13-21 years. The college is part of the Alpha Group Plus organisation. There are 339 young people on roll, 142 of whom board, mainly from overseas. Boarding accommodation is provided in three boarding houses in the centre of Cambridge and with host families. The boarding provision was last inspected in 2012.

## Inspection judgements

### The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

**Outstanding**

The overall judgment reflects the continued energy and drive to improve the boarding provision. Safeguarding arrangements are highly effective and comprehensively understood. The leadership and management of the school is excellent. The senior management team ensures that high aspirations and ambition to attain, achieve and improve are shared by staff, children and young people.

Children and young people make progress in all areas of their lives, including academic achievement, and in social and emotional outcomes. Staff scrutinise data comprehensively to evidence the impact of boarding on academic achievements. Exam results are significantly better for students who board compared to those living independently. Outcomes of A–A\* are up to 50% better for students who board compared to those who do not.

All staff are mindful of the cultural background and experiences of children and young people and are purposeful in preparing them for adult life. Boarding staff are an integral part of this approach, understanding children's and young people's unique needs and vulnerabilities due to being away from home. Staff are imaginative in providing them with experiences that prepare them for independence and to manage their personal and domestic routines. For instance, they learn to cook and share meals together as a social event. Children and young people know what is expected of them and grow in confidence. They are calm, confident and relaxed.

Staff in the independence accommodation are exceptionally skilled at establishing a rapport with children and young people who are not always confident in speaking English. They support children and young people to make their views known through informal chats and the use of surveys. Children and young people are clear that they know who to go to if they want to make a comment or complaint, and they are secure in the knowledge that this will be dealt with and shared when appropriate. An agent for children and young people said, 'I haven't ever had a student that has needed to complain, but I am confident that it would be dealt with. If staff were concerned, then they would inform me. The communication is extremely good.'

The partnership with the rest of the school is exceptional. Staff and managers are clear about the contribution that boarding makes to overall outcomes. For instance, each time they review a child's or young person's progress, results and actions are shared with the pastoral team and boarding staff so that they can support children and young people to achieve their goals. Children and young people are aware that staff across the school are working together and this helps them to feel secure and positive.

Children and young people are expected to engage in an individual programme of activities, creative pursuits and community-based activities. Boarding staff make sure that children and young people are balancing work and social activities. An agent spoken to highlighted this: 'There is a good balance of activities and a wide choice. This is very

useful. Academic work is important but so are activities so that they can make friends.'

## **The quality of care and support**

## **Outstanding**

Children and young people benefit from living in a nurturing environment in which their individual needs are recognised and fully supported. A well-organised and effective induction package supports international arrivals. Interpreters are available to aid the smooth induction of children and young people arriving from overseas. Staff are highly proactive in ensuring that the children and young people have contact numbers for house parents and are aware of who is on duty at all times. An emergency number is displayed and staff ensure that children and young people add these to their phone contacts as part of their induction.

Staff understand that the children's and young people's health and well-being is paramount to their learning. Effective communication between the boarding and academic staff underpins this process. Staff recognise signs and symptoms of harmful behaviours and low mood. Children, young people and staff have access to a knowledgeable pastoral team which guides them to access the appropriate support. Regular meetings between senior boarding staff and heads of year contribute to tailored support to meet individual need. An agent spoken to said, 'I am always informed of any concerns and swift steps are taken to provide support.'

Consultation with children and young people is embedded throughout the boarding environment. Children and young people feel listened to, as their opinions are regularly sought and valued. Regular surveys about their experience and feedback from tutors and boarding house meetings shape and define their environment. Suggestion boxes located around the school and boarding provision encourage feedback. A young person spoken to felt that staff did listen to their ideas, such as a computer console and television for the common rooms.

New purpose-built accommodation offers well-appointed, modern living arrangements. There are five floors, which are divided by gender. This affords single-room occupancy and en suite facilities. Furniture is of high quality. Children and young people put up posters and photos to personalise rooms and communal areas. There is ample space for playing cards or studying and a well-stocked library. An agent spoken to said, 'It is a very high standard and it is safe, which is reassuring for parents.' Studio flats and apartments provide accommodation for those preparing for further education. This teaches children and young people the skills they need to make a successful transition to university.

There is an extensive range of exciting activities, clubs and trips for children and young people to attend in school and in the local community. An agent commented, 'I think they have lots of clubs. I get a list of the clubs and events coming up, which I pass on to the parents.' Another agent said, 'There is a good balance between academic work and activities. A lot of the clubs are interlinked with what they want to do at university.' This enables children and young people to develop their interests and achieve a good balance of study and recreational time.

A robust medication policy addresses illness and administration of medication. Medication is stored and recorded appropriately and staff receive medication and first aid training regularly. Parents complete a health questionnaire before children and young people join the school. All children and young people are registered with the local general practitioner, dentist and optician. Robust health assessments are completed for children and young people who need them. These are comprehensive and outline the issue, action and outcome, with regular oversight from senior staff.

Meal times are a sociable occasion. Behaviour is exemplary and staff regularly join the children and young people. The catering is excellent, offering a well-presented variety of healthy nutritious choices with meals cooked freshly on the premises. The menus consist of an Asian option, non-Asian option, a vegetarian option and salad. Catering staff work closely with boarders regarding the food provided. A young person said, 'We can speak to the catering manager if we want things changed and there is a suggestion box.' The menu reflects their feedback.

Children and young people easily contact family and friends who are important to them. Staff understand the importance of children and young people being able to contact friends and families, particularly given that children and young people are a long way from home. An agent spoken to reported, 'The college has very good technical equipment, making it easy for students to contact home.' Internet issues are managed well, with new resources quickly made available to reflect its significance in supporting contact with home and study.

Staff provide exemplary role models. They consistently treat the children and young people with dignity and respect. They ensure that all cultural and religious needs are met. There are celebrations of different religious and cultural festivals, which embrace the international diversity in the school.

### **How well children and young people are protected**

**Good**

Children's and young people's safety is of the highest priority. Teaching children and young people about safe personal conduct in a new unknown environment is important to induction. All children and young people spoken to say that they feel safe and supported at the school. Feedback from an agent summarised this: 'I feel that the children are safe, the accommodation is safe and there is good security. I am happy with this. There is always fear, as it's a new country and a new language, but staff always ensure that children are safe and settled. This is important to the parents and myself.'

Safeguarding procedures and investigations are handled well, with swift decisive action taken and appropriate liaison with the designated officer in the local authority. Records are clear and show that advice is sought and acted upon. Staff understand how to whistle-blow and demonstrate that safeguarding children and young people steers all practice and interactions.

Positive behaviour is promoted and behavioural expectations are high and consistently maintained. There are occasionally children and young people who do not adhere to house rules, but actions taken are swift and are recorded well. Maintaining a safe environment and safe

conduct is paramount to the staff who enforce this with rigour and consistency.

Staff provide an e-safety course along with social media safety for children and young people as part of the induction process. Internet filters ensure that access to the internet is monitored.

Health and safety checks and fire drills meet requirements, excepting one house that has missed one drill. The focus on moving premises has stretched the site management team, resulting in gaps in monitoring of these records.

Staff are recruited safely and checks are consistently made, but two minor errors were identified and changes were made during the inspection.

Although all of the national minimum standards have been met, two areas were addressed during the inspection and led to managers making minor amendments. The school took immediate action, demonstrating strong compliance to ensure that all areas meet requirements. However, the oversight and overview of health and safety records and recruitment files lacks rigour. This has not had an impact on children's or young people's safety and was viewed as minor weakness.

## **The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers**

## **Outstanding**

The boarding provision is exceptionally well run and is integral to the whole school. There is an established ethos and culture of collaborative working that supports individual progress. Strong leadership is delivered by the headteacher, pastoral head and head of boarding. The senior leadership team works closely with the governing body. This results in a seamless provision with high aspirations to improve the boarding provision continually. This supports the school's aims, enabling children and young people to work towards their maximum potential.

Comprehensive policies and procedures underpin the smooth running of the boarding provision. These are understood by staff and translate clearly into practice. The senior leadership team has ambitious development plans. This has resulted in bespoke, purpose-built boarding accommodation and extensive extra-curricular activity provision. Consequently, the boarding environment provides outstanding care and education.

The governing body works with the school to continually drive improvements and raise standards. Visits carried out by governors evaluate the effectiveness of the boarding facilities. The school has carried out an audit against the national minimum standards to ensure compliance.

There is a number of new staff who are well supported and thoroughly enjoy their roles. Professional development is strongly encouraged, with courses identified to enable staff to meet the needs of children and young people while using and enhancing their existing skills. The team is stable, and staff are mainly graduates who have experience of studying away from home. This supports children and young people living overseas and meeting academic deadlines.

Feedback from parental surveys show a highly positive response: 100% of parents who filled in a survey say that they would recommend the school. Agents working on behalf of parents and the school provided positive feedback about excellent systems of communication and balance of activity and study periods. One agent said, 'If I send an email to staff about anything they always get back to me straight away'.



The school has a concise complaints policy outlining how to respond to complaints. There have been no complaints since the last inspection, and 'grumbles' are recorded in the log. This demonstrates good working relationships, and excellent systems of communication exist. An agent said, 'I haven't had a student that has needed to complain, but I am confident that it would be dealt with. If staff were concerned then they would inform me. I feel that the children are safe and I can reassure parents that their children are safe. The staff are very structured and logical.'

## What inspection judgements mean

The experiences and progress of children and young people are at the centre of the inspection. Inspectors will use their professional judgement to determine the weight and significance of their findings in this respect. The judgements included in the report are made against 'Inspections of boarding and residential provision in schools: the inspection framework'.

Judgement	Description
Outstanding	A school where the experiences and progress of children and young people consistently exceeds the standard of good and results in sustained progress and achievement. The outcomes achieved by children and young people are outstanding and the impact the boarding/residential provision has had in supporting this progress and achieving these outcomes is clearly evidenced.
Good	A school providing effective services which exceed minimum requirements. Children and young people are protected and cared for and have their welfare safeguarded and promoted.
Requires improvement	A school where there are no serious or widespread failures that result in children and young people's welfare not being safeguarded or promoted. However, the overall outcomes, experiences and progress of children and young people are not yet good.
Inadequate	A school where there are serious and/or widespread failures that mean children and young people are not protected or their welfare is not promoted or safeguarded or if their care and experiences are poor and they are not making progress.

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	136083
<b>Social care unique reference number</b>	SC438763
<b>DfE registration number</b>	873/6049

This inspection was carried out under the Children Act 1989, as amended by the Care Standards Act 2000, having regard to the national minimum standards for boarding schools.

<b>Type of school</b>	Boarding school
<b>Number of boarders on roll</b>	142
<b>Gender of boarders</b>	Mixed
<b>Age range of boarders</b>	13 to 21
<b>Headteacher</b>	Dr Julian Davies
<b>Date of previous boarding inspection</b>	04/12/2012–07/12/2012
<b>Telephone number</b>	01223 578 280
<b>Email address</b>	julian.davies@abbeycambridge.co.uk

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