



**EDUCATIONAL OVERSIGHT INSPECTION OF PRIVATE FURTHER
EDUCATION COLLEGES AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE SCHOOLS**

ALBEMARLE INDEPENDENT COLLEGE

(3387138)

PREFACE

This inspection report follows the Framework for Educational Oversight of private further education colleges and English language schools. The inspection consists of a three-day team inspection of the institution's educational provision.

The ISI is an approved Educational Oversight body authorised by the Home Office to inspect privately funded further education colleges and English language schools in England and Wales offering courses on the Qualifications and Credit Framework. It is designed to improve the quality of education on offer to international students who attend UK colleges through Tier 4 of the points-based system for student visas.

ISI inspections are required to:

- Report on the extent to which colleges comply with the published Educational Oversight Standards;
- Assess and report on the quality of educational outcomes and provision;
- Where applicable, make recommendations outside the scope of the Standards to support continued improvement of quality.

Inspection provides objective and reliable reports on the quality of colleges, and by placing reports in the public domain, makes this information available to students, Government and the wider community. Inspection takes account of the context of each individual college, and of how it evaluates its own performance and demonstrates its success.

The inspection of the college is from an educational perspective and provides limited inspection of other aspects, though inspectors will comment on any significant hazards or problems they encounter which have an adverse impact on students. The inspection does not include:

- (i) an exhaustive health and safety audit;
- (ii) an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the college, its services or other physical features;
- (iii) an investigation of the financial viability of the college or its accounting procedures;
- (iv) an in-depth investigation of the college's compliance with employment law.

2. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- 2.1 **The college exceeds expectations for the quality of education.** At the time of the inspection, all Standards for Educational Oversight were met and quality is excellent.
- 2.2 The quality of the curriculum, teaching and learners' achievements is excellent. Courses meet the college's aims in preparing students for university. Initial assessment is highly effective in placing students on courses matching their abilities and aspirations and identifying any learning support needs. Teaching staff are well qualified. The quality of teaching is excellent and enables students to make good progress. Assessment is used well to monitor progress and good feedback effectively informs students how to improve. Attainment is excellent and success rates are high compared with national average results for external examinations. Students are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning giving them increased confidence. Teaching resources are good but in a few classes are not fully exploited to involve students. Students are enthusiastic about their work and value the support given by their teachers. Courses on offer to Tier 4 students meet the definition of an approved qualification as set out in Home Office guidance.
- 2.3 Students' welfare, health and safety are excellent. Arrangements to promote health and safety are thorough and effective. Policies for fire safety and first aid are effectively implemented. Premises are regularly inspected and risk assessments carried out. Records are well maintained and actions required carried out promptly. Sufficient staff are trained as fire marshals and in first aid. Systems to monitor admissions and attendance of students on the premises are very effective and satisfy Home Office requirements; records are very accurate. Pastoral support is effective; relationships between staff and students are excellent. Although valuable feedback is provided from student surveys and responses to individual concerns are addressed rapidly, there is no forum for students to raise matters of general concern. The college has implemented a highly effective safeguarding policy incorporating its well-established strategies and good practice. Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) suitability checks are carried out on all staff. They undertake safeguarding training and are advised of the actions to take in the event of an incident. A programme to raise awareness of issues of radicalisation has not been implemented.
- 2.4 The effectiveness of governance, leadership and management is excellent. Oversight is highly effective. The principals take an active role in the work of the college and are successful in addressing its aims. Good financial planning and appropriate investment result in the college's successful development. Relationships between management and staff are very good. Effective policies are implemented and regularly reviewed. The college's performance is well monitored through the use of key performance indicators. The college has implemented an effective policy for quality assurance with good mechanisms in place which result in improvement. Staff participation in self-evaluation processes is encouraged but involvement is low. As a result some aspects of areas for development are overlooked. Staff recruitment is excellent; there is an effective appointments policy which details the process and suitability checks conducted. Staff files are well maintained providing complete and

consistent detail. Staff receive regular appraisals which include lesson observations for teachers. However, the lesson observation scheme is not well documented; responsibilities are not fully clarified and therefore clear actions are not always identified.

3. THE QUALITY OF THE CURRICULUM, TEACHING AND LEARNERS' ACHIEVEMENTS

3.(a) Assessment of students prior to or on arrival

- 3.1 Assessment of students prior to and on arrival is excellent. All students receive a thorough interview with senior staff before admission to the college. This is well documented and includes discussion of career aspirations, previous academic performance, interests and subjects of study. Accurate advice and guidance is provided to ensure that the proposed subjects of study and level of course match career intentions. Written information on each subject of study is provided and opportunities to meet subject teachers are arranged. Issues related to special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are discussed with students and parents.
- 3.2 Information from the initial assessments is used well to place students on the most suitable programme, and by the teachers in the planning of classes. Where students are identified as having learning or language difficulties these are supported through personal tutors. Effective additional support is available for students through timetabled courses.

3.(b) Suitability of course provision and curriculum

- 3.3 The course provision and curriculum is excellent. All staff are clear about the educational purpose of the college which is interpreted through well prepared schemes of work and effective lesson plans. Courses meet the requirements, aptitudes and capabilities of the students very well and provide an appropriate learning experience in accordance with the aims of the college. Courses satisfy students' needs in achieving good academic results to support entry to their chosen courses at universities.
- 3.4 Students state that courses are appropriately structured and timed to enable them to make good progress and prepare them well for future study at university.
- 3.5 The courses are well described in the prospectus and on the college website. Information provided is accurate, current and sufficient for prospective students to make an informed choice of college and courses.
- 3.6 A very high proportion of students complete the course for which they originally enrolled.
- 3.7 Courses on offer to Tier 4 students meet the definition of an approved qualification as set out in the Home Office guidance.

3.(c) The quality of teaching and its impact on learning

- 3.8 The quality of teaching and its impact on learning is excellent. Students make good progress in securing the knowledge, skills and understanding required for success in external examinations.
- 3.9 All teaching staff are highly qualified and have excellent subject knowledge. The vast majority have teaching qualifications. Tutors have a good understanding of students' prior attainments, abilities, career intentions and cultural needs; these are used effectively in planning. Teachers use appropriate activities to promote students' interest and active involvement in the subject. Lessons are well structured with clear objectives and time is used well.
- 3.10 All teaching is at least good and the majority is excellent. Classes are small and great attention is paid to providing individual support to enable students to make good progress. Lessons are well prepared and use a variety of methods to ensure that students fully understand their work. Frequent checks of learning are used effectively to monitor progress and confirm understanding. Detailed feedback from regular assessments and homework is used very well to identify areas for development and inform students how to improve. Teachers demonstrate detailed understanding of current examination structure and awarding body requirements.
- 3.11 Teaching is effectively supported by good classroom accommodation, good teaching resources and modern laboratory facilities. In a very small minority of classes, new technologies and related teaching strategies are not fully exploited to promote student engagement.

3.(d) Attainment and progress

- 3.12 Attainment and progress are excellent. Courses enable students to make progress and take responsibility for their own learning. Students say that they are making good progress. The use of individualised learning plans (ILPs) is most successful, enabling students to monitor their progress and manage their own performance. This gives them greater confidence. Teaching encourages students to make best use of their time.
- 3.13 Marking and constructive feedback from mock examinations, private study and homework support students' learning. They are used effectively to identify additional learning needs.
- 3.14 Student attainment is consistently high compared with national average performance data for the external examinations. Students achieve high grades based on their starting points. Directed study skills sessions are timetabled to support students in attaining the required grades for university entry.
- 3.15 Students are enthusiastic about their work at college and have a positive attitude towards their learning, appreciating the support provided by their teachers. The introduction of monthly academic tutorials has been extremely effective in

monitoring progress and identifying areas for attention. Students report that this has improved their awareness of their performance.

- 3.16 Surveys of the destinations of leavers show that the great majority of students achieve their intended course and university.

4. STUDENTS' WELFARE, INCLUDING HEALTH AND SAFETY

4.(a) Health, safety and security of the premises

- 4.1 Arrangements to ensure the health, safety and security of staff and students are excellent. The college has an effective health and safety policy which is communicated to staff and students through induction, regular briefings and informative notices prominently displayed throughout the building. Students and staff are fully aware of health and safety procedures.
- 4.2 Emergency signage is good, indicating fire exits and identifying staff with responsibilities for fire marshalling and first aid. Arrangements for evacuation of the building are effective. Fire drills are held regularly and recorded. Fire safety equipment is appropriately located and regularly maintained. Fire safety inspections and risk assessments are carried out annually by an independent consultancy. Inspection has also been conducted by the London Fire Brigade. A large number of staff have undertaken training as fire marshals to provide full coverage of the building in the event of fire. Regular health and safety inspections are carried out by staff; outcomes are recorded and actions required are addressed promptly.
- 4.3 Laboratory safety is excellent. Clear directions are given to staff and students; students and parents sign to acknowledge receipt and agreement to the safety policy in the laboratory. Comprehensive risk assessments are carried out for every practical and Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) guidance is adhered to. Appropriate precautions and controls are taken for the storage and use of chemicals.
- 4.4 The premises have undergone suitable adaptations for the delivery of the courses which are offered, including the development of facilities for science, art and photography.
- 4.5 Effective security measures are in place to ensure the safety of students, and systems have been introduced to record students present on site. Students regard the college as a safe environment. The premises are not accessible to wheelchair users; this information is available at initial interview.
- 4.6 There is a suitable first aid policy which requires accurate records of incidents to be kept and actions taken. This is supported by sufficient trained first aid staff. First aid boxes are maintained in the general office and laboratory.
- 4.7 The premises are fit for purpose, well decorated and maintained to a good standard. There are adequate washroom facilities. Classrooms are light, well-ventilated, maintained at a comfortable temperature and suitably insulated for sound. All rooms are kept in a clean, tidy and hygienic state. The furniture and fittings are appropriate for the needs of staff and students.

4.(b) Student registration and attendance records

- 4.8 Student registration and attendance records are excellent. There are clear terms and conditions for finance, with information on fees and deposits on the college website and in the college's prospectus.
- 4.9 Records for admission and registration are accurate and meticulously maintained. Full and detailed information is kept on students' files and records maintained electronically from the first point of contact with the college. Information is readily available to senior staff and administrators. There is a highly effective management information system designed to meet the college's needs. This system enables the production of reports to monitor attendance and student progress.
- 4.10 The attendance policy is effective and well implemented setting out clear expectations. Attendance rates are high; cases of absence are followed up rapidly and parents or guardians are informed. Effective systems are in place for reporting students studying under Tier 4 arrangements to the Home Office where they fail to enrol or do not meet the attendance requirements. Information relating to Home Office requirements is available on the website and is reinforced at student induction.

4.(c) Pastoral support for students

- 4.11 Pastoral support is excellent. Staff provide highly effective support and guidance for the students in accordance with their needs. Students have an effective induction programme which introduces the college's expectations and requirements and prepares them for their programme of study. Students report that staff are approachable, that they know who to go to with any personal issues and are confident such issues will be resolved.
- 4.12 Appropriate support is provided if students require assistance with accommodation. Arrangements are made through agencies and any recommended accommodation is visited by the college welfare officer to ensure that it meets satisfactory standards. The college has no role in arranging the accommodation or in terminating it.
- 4.13 Relationships between staff and students and amongst students are excellent. The college promotes integration and tolerance through a robust series of policies to prevent bullying and harassment. There is an excellent social programme to enrich students' experience, including sports activities and international cultural visits. Thorough risk assessments are carried out for all off site visits including international cultural tours and sporting activities.
- 4.14 There is excellent careers advice and familiarisation visits to universities.
- 4.15 Students provide feedback on their experience of college through a regular online survey, but there are no opportunities for students to provide group feedback which would lead to rapid positive action to address issues of common concern. Individual concerns brought to the attention of staff are addressed effectively.

4.(d) Safeguarding for under 18s.

- 4.16 Child protection is excellent. Good progress has been made in the development and implementation of a highly effective policy for safeguarding which incorporates the college's well-established strategies and good practice. Clear links are made with other policies including whistleblowing and staff code of conduct.
- 4.17 Senior staff are active in raising the awareness of staff and students in relation to issues of safeguarding. Safeguarding has a high profile with staff. Staff have undergone appropriate training and information to raise awareness of actions to be taken in the event of an incident is included in staff induction. A programme to raise awareness of issues associated with radicalisation has not been implemented.
- 4.18 Well-managed procedures are in place to ensure that students under 18 are well cared for. Appropriate suitability checks are carried out on staff prior to taking up an appointment at the college. Where DBS checks are delayed, alternative police checks are carried out and recorded on the staff central record.
- 4.19 There is a detailed internet and e-safety policy on the college website. There have been no instances of bullying through the internet or by mobile telephones but there are clear procedures for reporting such concerns.
- 4.20 Excellent progress has been made in providing records of students and staff on the premises to support safety and security. The college has commissioned a bespoke application for the smartphones of students under 18. The college is able to track students, and monitor the numbers of students on site for the purpose of safety and evacuation in the event of fire. If students under 18 do not wish to use this system they are required to sign in and sign out at reception. The presence of students over 18 on site is also closely monitored. Staff presence in college is also recorded. The development of these strategies has resulted in more accurate monitoring of student attendance on site outside class times.

5. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

5.(a) Ownership and oversight

- 5.1 Ownership and oversight are excellent. As principals, the proprietors provide highly effective oversight. They take an active and visible role in the leadership and management of the college, addressing its aims and providing positive educational direction. Responsibilities for educational standards are fully appreciated and effectively discharged establishing a clear ethos of high achievement for the college.
- 5.2 The principals have an excellent understanding of all aspects of the working of the college and are active in its strategic development. They are extremely effective in exercising their monitoring role and provide appropriate support and challenge to support its growth and development.
- 5.3 They provide a comprehensive range of policies which are effective in directing the activities of the college. These are appropriately implemented, monitored for effectiveness and reviewed regularly.
- 5.4 Robust financial planning and appropriate investment in staff, college accommodation and resources have contributed to the success of the college and its provision.
- 5.5 The proprietors ensure that the college has all necessary legal permissions in place and that staff comply with legal requirements. Responsibilities for welfare, health and safety are effectively discharged and statutory duties for students under 18 are fulfilled well.

5.(b) Management structures and responsibilities

- 5.6 Management structures and responsibilities are excellent. Management and leadership are highly effective; all staff have clear job descriptions and fully appreciate their roles and responsibilities in support of the aims and educational direction of the college. Communication between managers and staff is excellent.
- 5.7 Leadership is effective in creating a positive culture of mutual respect between staff and students supporting a constructive working environment. This is clearly demonstrated in the quality of education, students' achievements and the care and support provided for students.
- 5.8 Leadership and management are effective in self-evaluation and set appropriate and realistic targets for improvement which are monitored and achieved. Not all staff are actively involved in self-evaluation, although managers encourage participation through staff conferences and provision of opportunities for feedback. In consequence some aspects of the college's strengths and areas for development are missed.

- 5.9 Managers at all levels are most successful in securing excellent staff who are highly qualified and experienced. Staff receive good staff development and appropriate support to ensure that they are suitably trained to meet the needs of all students, to a high standard, in safeguarding, welfare, health and safety.

5.(c) Quality assurance including student feedback

- 5.10 Quality assurance is excellent. Excellent progress has been made in developing a coherent quality management policy which identifies the critical elements in the management and improvement of the college's performance. There are well-defined mechanisms which result in the improvement of the quality of provision and maintenance of the existing high standards.
- 5.11 Managers receive regular reports on key performance indicators, and use these effectively to monitor the college's performance and establish priorities for improvement.
- 5.12 Opportunities provided for staff and student feedback are good. Information is used effectively to develop the college and make improvements in provision.
- 5.13 Information on student performance is used well. The development of ILPs and monthly academic tutorials has had a strong impact in promoting students' independence in monitoring their progress and managing their own performance. Information on student progress is accessible to parents on-line.
- 5.14 There is an appropriate complaints policy, details of which are available on the college website. Provision is made for written records to be kept and the stage at which resolution was achieved. Should the complaint not be resolved through internal processes there is the facility for external arbitration.
- 5.15 The college has an excellent staff appraisal strategy. The process allows for annual meetings and makes effective use of information from self-evaluation, student achievement, feedback and teaching observations. There is an effective lesson observation policy but procedures are not fully documented to show responsibilities and how these lead to improvement. This reduces clarity over actions to be taken.
- 5.16 Appraisal is linked to staff development and supports training which addresses college and personal needs. Staff development related to subject examinations and awarding body policy is well used by staff, and teachers have excellent knowledge of current requirements. Opportunities to participate in professional development related to new technologies and new teaching strategies in the classroom are not exploited.

5.(d) Staff recruitment, qualifications and suitability checks

- 5.17 Staff recruitment is excellent. The college attracts highly qualified and experienced staff, and staff retention is high.

- 5.18 The college has a thorough, well-implemented appointments policy which describes highly effective procedures for the recruitment, selection and appointment of staff. Prospective staff are interviewed by senior management and teachers are required to give a demonstration class. Prior to the confirmation of appointment, checks are made to confirm identity and right to work in the UK. Further checks are made on applicants' medical fitness and suitability to work with students under 18, including enhanced criminal record check by the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS). Academic and employment references are obtained from all applicants following interview.
- 5.19 The college has made excellent progress in maintaining staff files; records are complete and consistent. All files have a checklist showing contents. Details of all of the checks made to confirm right to work in the UK and identity, plus medical fitness checks and references have been compiled. Information is summarised effectively showing completion of all the checks made on an electronic staff central record which is regularly updated.

5.(e) Provision of information

- 5.20 Provision of information is excellent. All Standards for the provision of information are met. Comprehensive information is available through the college's website sufficient for students and parents to make an informed choice of college and course of study. Further information is available through the college prospectus and supplementary leaflets.
- 5.21 The college provided all information requested by the inspectors.

INSPECTION EVIDENCE

The inspectors observed lessons, conducted formal interviews with students and examined samples of students' work. They held discussions with senior members of staff and with the proprietors. The responses of staff and students to confidential pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined regulatory documentation made available by the college.

Inspectors

Mr Peter Wood	Lead Inspector
Mrs Sue Martin	Team Inspector
Ms Diana Morriss	Team Inspector