

Inspection of Abbeygate Sixth Form College

Inspection dates: 16 to 18 May 2023

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

The quality of education	Outstanding
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
Personal development	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Outstanding
Education programmes for young people	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this provider

Abbeygate Sixth Form College (the college) is a 16 to 19 academy based in Bury St Edmunds. It is part of Suffolk Academies Trust and the Eastern Colleges Group. The college was established in 2019. It offers A-level qualifications to students in Bury St Edmunds and the surrounding area. The college currently has around 900 students studying full-time education programmes for young people. The college offers 30 A-level subjects and one criminology vocational qualification. The college has no subcontracted provision and no students in receipt of high needs funding.

What is it like to be a learner with this provider?

Students relish the opportunities available to them at the college. They thoroughly enjoy their studies. Students enjoy the calm, respectful and productive learning environment at college.

Students value the excellent opportunities to develop their talents and interests while at the college and to make new friends. Students take part in a wide range of clubs and societies. These include environmental societies, drama and music groups and a variety of sports teams. Students take part in competitions, such as mathematical Olympiad, German debating and law mooting competitions. Students can participate in a range of international trips and visits through the Turing Scheme. Arts students have worked with Brazilian artists in Rio de Janeiro. Business and economics students visited India to explore global businesses. Students visited Thailand and raised funds for a school and orphanage. Students highly value these opportunities, and participation rates are high. As a result of these trips, students appreciate the importance of contributing actively to their local, national and international communities.

Students play an active part in their local community. As a result, students develop a sound understanding of the importance of being a good citizen. Students have their own charity committee. They have organised events for a local hospice and for Alzheimer's research. Visual arts students work on arts projects in the local community to design and paint murals for the town centre.

Students appreciate the highly inclusive nature of the college. Students understand the importance of listening to others' differing views and engaging sensitively in debate. Staff encourage students to speak up, express their views and ask questions if they do not understand. As a result, students develop strong independent study skills. They have positive attitudes to learning and gain the confidence to explore new topics.

Students value highly the excellent help they receive while at college. They have high levels of attendance and are punctual to lessons. Students feel safe at college. They do not experience bullying and harassment.

What does the provider do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders, managers and teachers have designed a highly ambitious 'super curriculum'. This significantly extends students' knowledge and skills beyond the required taught curriculum. Directed independent learning tasks engage students with the world of work. These tasks involve activities, challenges or tasks set by teachers. In politics and religious studies, students run a model United Nations event. At this event, students research and work through countries' different responses to the war in Ukraine. Chemistry students select 'molecule of the month'. They then present their findings to classmates. Drama students consider the skills involved in writing plays. As a result, students broaden and deepen their knowledge and understanding of topics.

Leaders, managers and teachers have notably high expectations of students. Students of all abilities study additional courses, such as the extended project qualification and level 3 core mathematics. These qualifications provide additional challenge to students. Students are set stretching target grades. Progress against these grades is frequently reviewed. Target grades are often increased to take account of students' performance on their courses. As a result, students strive to achieve higher grades. In addition, teachers organise a range of visiting speakers, trips and visits which extend students' understanding. In biology, for example, students visit research laboratories. They develop knowledge of a range of diseases and biochemical techniques.

Leaders and teachers carefully sequence the curriculum. They give considerable thought to the planning and depth of individual curricular content. As a result, students develop considerable knowledge over time. In the first year, religious studies students undertake dialogues. This allows them to understand the important differences between explaining and evaluating. More challenging topics, such as religious language and meta-ethics, are introduced in Year 13, when students have a more secure understanding of philosophical principles and the work of various scholars. As a result, students recall key facts and concepts very effectively.

Teachers are well-qualified subject experts. They use questioning skilfully. In visual arts, teachers skilfully use targeted and probing questions to help students reflect on their work. As a result, students learn to use self-assessment and peer assessment very effectively. In religious studies, teachers ask probing, incisive questions to help students articulate reasoned arguments. Consequently, students develop exceptionally good reasoning and critical evaluation skills.

Teachers use a range of highly effective approaches to help students remember concepts. In religious studies, teachers take care to continually teach the concepts of philosophy, ethics and religion. As a result, students develop a range of knowledge and skills simultaneously. Psychology teachers use fast recall techniques to encourage students to develop their use of basic terms. Psychology students can recall and use terms such as generalisation and discrimination appropriately. Consequently, students are well prepared for their final examinations. Most students, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds or those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, achieve very well.

Teachers provide students with extremely helpful feedback. As a result, students understand what they are doing well and what they need to do to improve. Students are highly motivated to correct and resubmit their work. Consequently, students produce work of a good and often exceptionally high standard. In A-level mathematics, teachers provide students with detailed feedback on their assessments. Teachers then support students to focus on their weaker areas. As a result, students know what they need to do to improve, and they make improvements in their mathematical skills over time.

Staff at the college undertake a large amount of impactful professional development. They join communities of practice within the college group to share best practice. Staff undertake individual inquiries into their own teaching practice and how this can

be improved. Arts staff are involved in local community arts groups. As a result, staff extend their subject knowledge and improve their teaching skills, benefiting students.

Students learn substantial new knowledge and skills while on their A-level courses. Psychology students learn about Bandura's social learning theory. Religious studies students show a secure understanding of concepts such as universal salvation and free will. Criminology students develop a sound understanding of community service. Students study the impact of this on offenders. Biology students develop a clear knowledge of electron transport chains and oxidative phosphorylation. Textiles students analyse different artists and artistic approaches. They learn how to create images and 3D artefacts. Students develop their skills to be able to research and evaluate key concepts. As a result, students are very well prepared for future study.

Leaders and managers have developed highly effective quality improvement processes. They listen to, and act on, student views about the quality of their learning experience. Leaders have, for example, amended their tutorial programme in response to student feedback. They have introduced more discussion and debate, and have timetabled tutorials in a more relaxed setting. As a result, leaders have improved the student experience still further.

Leaders provide an effective careers programme. As a result, students receive unbiased information about their potential next steps. Students attend helpful progression days, where they consider different future career routes. Through the Aimhigher programme, students are supported and encouraged to apply for places at top universities. A wide range of employers attend the college. They work with students and discuss apprenticeships. As a result, students are very well prepared for their next steps. Students progress to positive destinations on leaving the college. Most secure places at their first-choice university or achieve apprenticeships with prestigious public and private sector companies and organisations.

Experienced governors have appropriate skills to support senior leaders. Governors focus on the right things and provide strong challenge to leaders. Governors challenge leaders to monitor and evaluate the impact of new initiatives, such as the directed independent learning project.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have developed an effective culture of safeguarding. As a result, students feel safe at the college.

The designated safeguarding lead (DSL) and deputy DSLs are appropriately trained. They are well supported by the central safeguarding team at the Eastern Colleges Group. Leaders have sound safeguarding processes in place. When there are safeguarding concerns, they make appropriate referrals. Leaders and managers follow safer recruitment processes for staff and governors.

Leaders, managers, governors and staff have a sound understanding of the local safeguarding risks. Staff involved in safeguarding work very closely with local schools and other safeguarding partners. As a result, they meet regularly to discuss local risks.

Provider details

Unique reference number	147063
Address	Beetons Way Bury St Edmunds Suffolk IP33 3YU
Contact number	01284636501
Website	https://www.abbeygatesfc.ac.uk/
Principal	David Gartland
Provider type	16 to 19 academy
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Main subcontractors	None

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the assistant principal, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. The inspection was carried out using the [further education and skills inspection handbook](#) and took into account all relevant provision at the provider. Inspectors collected a wide range of evidence to inform judgements, including visiting learning sessions, scrutinising learners' work, seeking the views of learners, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

Inspection team

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