

Inspection report

Lansdowne College

Independent sixth form College

DfES ref no: 213/6389

Inspection under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002

Dates of inspection: 5 - 8 December 2005

INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by the Office for Standards in Education under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002 in order to advise the Secretary of State for Education and Skills about the college's suitability for continued registration as an independent college.

Information about the college

Lansdowne College was founded in 1976 and is situated in a quiet residential road near to Kensington Gardens and Hyde Park. It is an independent sixth form college providing education for male and female students aged 14 - 19. Students travel across Greater London to attend the college. Most are following full-time courses leading to qualifications in a range of subjects. Currently there are 183 full-time students, 110 male and 73 female students; a few are part-time. There are 15 who are of compulsory school age. While the college currently has no students with special educational needs, it recruits some students for whom English is not their first language.

The college provides a wide range of courses leading to qualifications of General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE), General Certificate of Education (GCE) Advanced Subsidiary (AS) and Advanced Level (A2). These courses are provided over a range of time spans to suit the needs of students.

The college bases its provision on the belief that students respond well to being treated as young adults. The college staff believe the combination of expert tuition, hard work and pastoral care underpin success. The college measures its academic success in terms of qualifications gained, and carries out comparisons with the performance of other similar establishments and examination results nationally. The college takes pride in the less tangible but important personal development of students, including such factors as confidence, self-reliance and being prepared for the challenges of university and life in general.

Summary of main findings

Lansdowne College provides a good educational experience for its students through a broad curriculum, effective teaching and very good pastoral care. It meets almost all regulatory requirements and has no significant weaknesses.

What the college does well:

- there is an excellent range of subjects available to study for GCSE and GCE A level qualifications;
- the college generates an ethos of purposeful endeavour and excellent relationships;
- the personal tutor system ensures effective monitoring of academic and personal development;

- high quality teaching promotes success in examinations and good personal development of students; and
- the effective assessment and reporting systems ensure that parents are well informed about the progress of their sons or daughters.

What the college must do in order to comply with the regulations:

- make it possible for students with physical disabilities to have access to the college.

Next Steps

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

- review the careers education provided to complement the careers guidance received by students;
- consider how sixth form students' extension and enrichment activities could be developed further; and
- pursue data analysis methods that would allow the measurement of the long-term progress of students.

COMPLIANCE WITH THE REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION

1. The quality of education provided by the college

The quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is good and all areas of experience are covered, although specific emphasis is not placed on religious education and aspects of technology beyond information and communication technology (ICT). Admission procedures ensure that students and courses are well matched.

Students in Years 10 and 11 follow a broad curriculum in which an excellent range of nearly 20 subjects is available. The core subjects are English, mathematics, dual award science, and ICT. Additionally, three different subjects are studied in each term of Year 10: drama, history, French; art, geography, Spanish; photography, English literature and either French or Spanish. This arrangement provides experience of subjects which could be studied optionally in Year 11. Further optional subjects are also available. The provision of the different subjects is suitably balanced.

In addition, students have effective support and extensions to their programmes in a sports afternoon, an activities afternoon, an examination practice period, homework/coursework clubs, a personal tutor session, and a course of personal, social and health education (PSHE). This covers elements of citizenship; including politics, discrimination and racial prejudice, and age-related topics such as health and nutrition, drug abuse and personal relationships. Speakers provide a valuable supplement to the programme, for example, with talks on sexual health and eating disorders. The activities programme includes cultural and scientific awareness, with visits to places such as the National Gallery, the Natural History Museum, the Imperial War Museum, the BBC, the British Museum and the Globe Theatre. Several recreational activities are also built into the programme, such as ice skating and bowling.

A strong emphasis is placed on careers guidance and choice of subjects. This is supported through the personal tutor system and the well-established advice available for students intending careers in medicine, finance and law. Careers education is not a prominent feature, although some attention is given to it, particularly at the end of Year 11 and again at the end of Year 12, when the students complete and discuss an interest questionnaire. The *'learning to learn'* programme supports the students' current work effectively and prepares them well for their future educational needs. It includes a variety of useful study skills, for example, time management, mind mapping, and research, coursework and essay-writing skills.

Students choose their A-level programme from an excellent array of more than 40 subjects. The college prides itself on making all combinations possible. In addition to their academic subjects, Year 12 students have a weekly tutorial period, an activities programme, similar to that for Years 10 and 11, supervised private study, examination practice and a personal tutor session. They also attend the talks by visiting speakers on PSHE topics. In Years 12 and 13, students are well supported

in finding out about higher education courses, either through the help of the relevant tutors or in the programme specially provided for those interested in medicine. The students' key skills are strongly furthered within their A-level subjects and in study skills workshops. Year 13 students receive helpful guidance in making applications to higher education.

Extra-curricular activities are of reasonable scope for a college of this kind and are arranged by the student council, thus affording a valuable opportunity for the personal development of those organising them. They are available to all year groups and include, for example, football, netball, basketball, table tennis, the publication of the student magazine and debating.

In the pre-inspection questionnaire, the students expressed strong satisfaction with their courses, teaching and support at the college and noted their enjoyment at attending it, but a third of those in the sixth form indicated that they would like more consideration of careers and more enrichment and extra-curricular activities.

Any pupils with limited English (less than a GCSE qualification) are tested on arrival at the college and, if necessary, placed on a course for English as a foreign language. Support for the use of English in other subjects is provided by the specialist English teacher when needed. Much sensitive help for pupils' English is also given within the teaching of other subjects.

The quality of teaching and assessment

Teaching in the college is of a high standard. Teachers are well qualified and show good subject knowledge. Teaching is at least good in the large majority of lessons, and some is outstanding. In the best lessons, students are required to be engaged and they demonstrate high levels of application. This is often achieved through teaching that uses a variety of methods, such as discussion, group work, individual research and focused questions to elicit students' ideas and to check their understanding. The few less successful lessons involved too much talk from teachers and little response required from students. As a consequence, there was little challenge to individual performance.

The college makes clear in its staff handbook that teaching should be varied and should promote students' engagement. To support this endeavour, a good range of teaching techniques is set out in the handbook. Monitoring of lessons by senior staff also promotes good standards. While examination outcomes give some insight into the success of teaching, the college also evaluates the success of teaching through other means. Students complete questionnaires to give feedback on the quality of teaching and of courses. These are thoroughly analysed and show high levels of confidence and satisfaction in the quality of teaching. The personal tutor system provides a clear mechanism for students to raise issues about teachers and courses, and personal tutor records demonstrate that any concerns are dealt with systematically and effectively. There is a weekly 'think tank' at which staff review and evaluate the methods deployed.

A systematic approach to lesson planning is also a strength in the college. Teachers are working to well-developed schemes of work, and individual lessons are planned

to match activities to students' needs to achieve the desired educational objectives. In most lessons this results in a good pace of working which keeps students engaged, and provides appropriate challenges. The teachers' secure subject knowledge, their enthusiasm for teaching the subject, and good planning combine to promote high quality learning. The small class sizes and clearly detailed knowledge that teachers have of students' performance, also contribute to the effectiveness of teaching.

Teachers are well aware of the achievements of their students. Testing is carried out by teachers and they have access to previous results and examination scripts for students resitting examinations. Assessment and reporting are coherent and involve students, teachers, personal tutors and parents in a systematic approach. The outcomes of assessment are used well to inform the planning of teachers for the needs of individual students. They also inform the students of how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve and give parents an insight into the progress of their sons and daughters.

Students have weekly examination practice periods, mock examinations and monthly reports from subject teachers to the personal tutors. These reports form the basis of a productive and well-informed dialogue between individual students and their personal tutors. Interviews with students and scrutiny of their completed questionnaires show that they have a very high regard for the personal tutors and the quality of support they give. Parents receive five reports a year, and also have access at other times to assessment data through the students' planners. The college does not use all the data available to evaluate the long term progress of students. Data from public examinations, and the thorough analysis of results carried out by the college, show high levels of performance.

Behaviour in the college is very good. Teachers set good examples of behaviour and of commitment to high standards of work. Students, on the whole, show maturity and behave in responsible ways. There are good levels of respect between teachers and students and the ethos in the college is harmonious and greatly concerned with good achievement.

Does the college meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

2. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students

Self-confidence and self-esteem are promoted throughout the college. Students take responsibility for their own work and contribute positively in lessons by giving their views and the reasons for them.

Spiritual development is good. Aesthetic sensitivity is apparent in English in the students' writing and in the study of literature, poetry in particular. In artistic subjects they can identify different emotions and discuss and even replicate them in their own art, drama and writing. They are aware of their reasons for choosing particular subject matter and can show their personal reactions to it.

Students show strong moral sensitivity in discussions, particularly in subjects such as history, English and PSHE and in talking about their charity activities. The support of charities plays a valuable and enjoyable part in college life through activities such as fund raising on a day when different dress is worn, in games competitions and at the end-of-year ball.

Relationships between students are excellent in their day-to-day contacts with one another and with their tutors. The college council does much to promote contact between students through its committees. As members of these, students exercise responsibilities for organising sports, social events – for example, the Christmas party and the end-of-year ball – charity fund raising, and communications activities such as preparing a student magazine.

Cultural awareness is a major strength among the students, who show respect and tolerance for those from different traditions and different religious backgrounds. Students willingly accept views and practices different from their own. For example, ‘*Fasting is okay!*’ as one student put it. Students gain an understanding of culture within the context of London and its wide cosmopolitan diversity and history. This is achieved partly through the activities programme and partly through visits organised by subject departments, such as those for drama and art.

Does the college meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

3. The welfare, health and safety of the students

Students are very well cared for at Lansdowne College. Interviews with students and the questionnaires they completed showed high level regard for the quality of care shown to them by subject teachers and personal tutors. The personal tutor system provides very effective support. It is clear that the frequent assessments in subjects are much enhanced by the exchanges between students and their personal tutors. Students have monthly opportunities to discuss their academic performance and personal matters whether inside or outside college. Personal tutors keep good quality records of tutorial meetings, and these records show how problematic situations develop and are successfully resolved. Students feel able to approach members of staff other than their personal tutors and view positively the support they receive.

The college has a complete suite of policies that clearly set out standards and procedures in all the required areas, such as anti-bullying, behaviour, child protection and health and safety. All these policies are up to date and have been reviewed recently.

The anti-bullying policy describes the scope of bullying and its prevention well. It makes clear the responsibilities of teachers and students and addresses bullies directly. In interviews with students of all ages they could not recall any incidents of bullying, and described the good relationships they have with other students in very positive terms. Students who had encountered bullying in other educational

establishments described how significantly better relationships in the college are. In the child protection policy the roles and duties of staff are made clear. Records show that all staff have received appropriate training. The named child protection officers are fully trained and the retraining requirements are planned into the college's programme.

Health and safety issues are well analysed, and policies put in place that are relevant and fit for purpose. There are clear responsibilities ascribed to named members of staff. The procedures for the safe management of educational visits provide a sound basis for activities taking place outside the college. Within the college the measures required to keep students safe are good. Fire equipment and regulatory requirements are up to date. Emergency exits are well signed and students understand the safety measures and what is required of them in the event of a fire, for example. Regular fire drills take place and are well recorded. If students have an accident, First Aid equipment and qualified staff are readily available. Any accident or injury is recorded in appropriate detail in an incident book.

Matters of administration are carried out effectively. These include keeping admission and attendance registers, recording sanctions imposed on students, and ensuring the running of the college complies with regulatory requirements. For example, the college has a policy on disability and special needs which incorporates a plan for improving access and facilities. This planning is reviewed annually to identify ways in which accessibility can be improved.

Does the college meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

4. The suitability of the proprietor and staff

The appropriate official checks are carried out with the Criminal Records Bureau and the college keeps a record of its own checking of identity, qualifications, curriculum vitae and references.

Does the college meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

5. The suitability of the premises and accommodation

The quality of accommodation at Lansdowne College is good. It is in one building that is comprised of four floors. The building is very well maintained, well decorated, tidy and clean. Rooms are well lit, well heated and ventilated and provide a good environment for learning. The management of the college continually review their accommodation and ensure that it matches the needs of students and courses.

The college has well-equipped laboratories which provide high-quality areas for science practical work. In all rooms there is sufficient space for students to work and the furniture and fittings are appropriate for the students' needs. Students have suitable access to ICT, and there is a supervised study centre in which quiet

individual study takes place out without disturbance. There are areas in the college where students relax and associate freely with each other in a safe environment. The canteen is a well appointed area that provides for collaborative working and association with other students in a convivial atmosphere. The food preparation facilities and processes are hygienic, and the range of food prepared is broad, well-balanced and healthy. The students speak highly of the food available, and, for students of compulsory school age, the college ensures healthy diets, for example, by restricting access to chips to once a fortnight.

The college has ensured that emergency exits are clearly identified, and that there are no hindrances to the safe evacuation of the buildings for staff and students. To enter the college main entrance, students have to climb a flight of five steps. Although the college has no students with physical disabilities, college staff would have to, for example, lift a wheelchair and user up those steps to gain access. There are no formal teaching rooms on the ground floor. Toilets for students are located only in the basement and on the second floor. Making changes to this leased building in a residential area would be difficult, but the college is actively seeking ways of improving access for the disabled.

Does the college meet the requirements for registration?

The college meets all but one of the regulations.

What does the college need to do to comply with the regulations?

In order to comply with the Independent Schools Standards Regulations 2003 the college should:

- *make it possible for students with physical disabilities to have access to the building (paragraph 5(h)).*

6. The quality of information for parents and other partners

Very good information is provided for parents. They receive a colourful and informative prospectus supported by a parents' handbook and other details about the college. The principal notifies them that full versions of policies and further information can be obtained on request.

The annual newsletter gives lively accounts of students' activities during the year and does much to bring out the essential characteristics of the college and the enjoyment and achievement of the students. The college has a helpful website and uses a number of other ways and occasions to communicate with parents.

Parents receive full information on their children's progress five times each year in reports which provide grades for performance and effort, together with a summary of attendance and comments from the personal tutor and from the relevant subject tutors. Where necessary, tutors suggest how further progress can be made. In addition, parents of students in Years 10 to 12 are informed by their son or daughter of the results of the monthly assessments of their progress.

Frequent parents' evenings are held to discuss the students' work and parents may make email contact direct with the relevant personal tutor. The college also offers a ready meeting with any parent requesting it. Parents of students new to the college have a 'meet the tutors' evening in the first term.

Open evenings are held for prospective students and their parents, and parents attend the admission interview with their son or daughter.

The overwhelming majority of the parents who replied to the pre-inspection questionnaire recorded a high degree of satisfaction with the college's academic provision and with its approachability should they wish to discuss any matter relating to their son or daughter.

Does the college meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

7. The effectiveness of the college's procedures for handling complaints

The policy on handling concerns and complaints is written with clarity and the procedures it describes are carried out thoroughly.

Does the college meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

COLLEGE DETAILS

Name of college:	Lansdowne College
DfES Number:	213/6389
Type of college:	Sixth Form College
Status:	Independent
Age range of students:	14 – 19 years
Gender of students:	Mixed
Number on roll (full-time pupils):	Boys: 110 Girls: 73 Total: 183
Number on roll (part-time pupils):	Boys: 8 Girls: 3 Total: 11
Annual fees (day pupils):	£2,500 - £13,350
Address of college:	40 - 44 Bark Place London W2 4AT
Telephone number:	020 7616 4400
Fax number:	020 7616 4401
Email address:	education@lansdownecollege.com
Headteacher:	Hugh Templeton
Proprietor:	Lansdowne Tutors Ltd
Reporting Inspector:	Ian Richardson
Date of inspection:	5 - 8 December 2005

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