

## **Inspection report**

### **Mander Portman Woodward (MPW) Cambridge**

**Independent Fifth and Sixth Form College**

**DfES ref no: 873/6017**

**Inspection under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002**

**Dates of inspection: 5 - 8 June 2006**

## **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 school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

### **Information about the college**

Mander Portman Woodward is a small independent fifth and sixth form college. It is co-educational and provides education for students between the ages of 14 and 21 years. There are currently 97 students on roll, of whom 16 are of compulsory school age (CSA). The college is a member of the Council for Independent Further Education (CIFE) and is accredited by the British Accreditation Council for Independent Further and Higher Education (BAC). It is a member of a group of similar colleges owned by Mander Portman Woodward Ltd.

Established in Cambridge in 1987, it occupies two large linked Victorian houses on a quiet road a short walking distance from the centre of the city. Admission is by interview and students enter the college having had a wide range of previous academic experience. The majority of students live locally and attend the college on a daily basis. Currently, 30 advanced level students from abroad lodge in Cambridge whilst attending courses. Foreign students are required to have a high level of proficiency in English before they are admitted, although additional support is available from the college. A wide range of academic courses is offered leading to the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE), Advanced Subsidiary (AS), and Advanced Level (A2).

The aims of the college are set out in the prospectus, which emphasises the importance of hard work and that once a student is accepted, the aim of the college *'is to provide the most effective possible preparation for the specific exams'* that the student will be taking. It further emphasises the importance placed on *'intensive tuition in small groups, close personal monitoring of academic progress and regular examination practice'*. The college aim is to provide a *'friendly and informal working environment'* where the atmosphere is *'positive and conducive to success'*.

### **Summary of main findings**

This is a successful college. It meets its aims of providing a supportive learning environment where students, including CSA students, some of whom have previously experienced difficulty with learning, make good academic progress. Its curriculum succeeds in providing a wide range of courses and the quality of teaching is good. Students feel valued and this makes an important contribution to their academic and personal development. The college's high expectations and its emphasis on the positive, encourage students of all ages and abilities to gain confidence and to develop mature attitudes to learning. Students' progress is supported by the hard work and commitment of staff and the insightful leadership

provided by the college management. Plans for development are well founded on clearly identified priorities.

**What the college does well:**

- its curriculum provision serves the needs of individual students effectively;
- the quality of its teaching is good, with nearly a third of teaching outstanding;
- its provision supports the development of students' self-confidence and self-esteem, particularly CSA students;
- it provides a positive learning environment; and
- it uses available data well to monitor students' progress and to support further improvement and development.

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

- improve the supervision of CSA students who leave the premises during the school day;
- improve systems for recording attendance;
- ensure that the otherwise thorough checks made when new staff are appointed include medical checks; and
- improve facilities provided for students who may be ill during the college day.

**Next Steps**

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

- implement the plans already prepared to improve provision for CSA students.

# **COMPLIANCE WITH THE REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION**

## **1. The quality of education provided by the college**

### **The quality of the curriculum**

The college curriculum serves the needs of its students of all ages, abilities and aptitudes well. It reflects the aims and ethos of the college as expressed by the prospectus and other documents. Of those students who enter the college to take AS and A2 examinations, a significant minority take re-sit examinations to improve the level of their grades. Data shows that the college supports the vast majority of these students successfully in achieving their aims. The curriculum for CSA students and those who take GCSE, most of whom have experienced previous difficulties with learning, is designed to support their progress both academically and personally. The college is very successful in supporting this group of students to make progress.

The college offers a wide range of courses at GCSE, AS and A2 levels. These are carefully tailored to meet individual students' needs. The majority of students take advanced level courses and these are offered over one or two years. In addition the college offers short re-take courses, revision courses and Oxbridge entry courses. Traditionally the college has offered a 'stream' within its advanced level provision to provide for students aiming for careers in medicine. CSA students study GCSE over one or two years. Provision for CSA students is suitably broad and balanced. All these students study English, mathematics, personal, social and health education (PSHE) and physical education during their two-year course. Although currently there are no students with statements of special educational need, at all levels the specialist support available to students who experience learning difficulties is effective. Support in English for students from abroad is similarly effective. The personal tutor system, which is central to monitoring students' academic progress, is valued by students at all levels.

The curriculum is clearly set out in the prospectus and on the well-designed college website. Information available to parents and students is further supplemented by the wide range of additional booklets and guidance papers provided, which are readily accessible; for example, the individual course booklets describing GCSE courses and their requirements. Outline schemes of work are provided for all subjects, but some lack sufficient detail and guidance. The majority do not reflect the effective teaching methodology seen in a large proportion of lessons. The scheme of work for PSHE taken by CSA students provides more detail.

The college has responded carefully in tailoring courses to meet CSA students' individual needs. Although the inspection was unable to observe a PSHE lesson due to the examination timetable operating, scrutiny of the programme and feedback from students emphasised the value of the course. The PSHE course provides careers guidance for the students, together with aspects of citizenship. The design of the course plays an important role in supporting the students in developing their confidence and in preparing them for the next stage of their education. The college is alert to developing curriculum needs. Planning for improvements in the provision for CSA students for the next academic year has already been completed. Extra-

curricular provision is reasonable, but a number of parents and students who responded to pre-inspection questionnaires felt that it required improvement.

### **The quality of teaching and assessment**

The quality of teaching is good and promotes students' good progress and success in examinations. Outstanding teaching was evident in a high proportion of lessons. No unsatisfactory teaching was observed. Teachers' subject knowledge is excellent and they have a good understanding of the course requirements. They place a strong emphasis on developing students' independent study skills and examination techniques systematically. High quality working relationships between staff and students successfully promote students' confidence and motivate them to achieve their best. Teachers encourage students' personal, as well as their academic, preparation for examinations with considerable success. The college analyses results systematically and demonstrates that students achieve well according to their abilities.

Well-planned lessons build upon students' prior learning. Objectives are clear, activities are carefully structured to ensure good gains in students' learning, and effective use is made of learning resources. In the best lessons, teaching styles are well-tailored to students' individual needs. For example, this was evident in a lesson on developing vocabulary and in a number of mathematics lessons where the step-by-step approach to solving problems successfully enhanced students' self-confidence. Teachers make good use of questioning to probe and develop students' knowledge and understanding. In the best practice, teachers' questions successfully challenged students, particularly the more able, to develop their higher-order thinking skills. This was particularly well-illustrated in science lessons, where students aiming to study medicine were actively encouraged to apply their knowledge and understanding in a specialised area.

The college meets the needs of students with English as an additional language effectively, with many subject teachers systematically, yet sensitively, checking students' understanding of language. Just occasionally, there were some missed opportunities to fully secure students' understanding of important concepts that underpin future learning.

The pace of most lessons is brisk, with teachers making good use of praise and encouragement. Their inclusion of real-life exemplars, for example, in economics and religious education lessons, to illustrate and develop theoretical concepts successfully enhance discussions and dialogue. Students beyond compulsory school age collaborate well with each other and value each others' contributions and points of view. They are highly motivated to achieve the best possible grades and work diligently. Students say that regular homework and frequent timed assignments have helped them to develop discipline and rigour in their work.

Despite the disruption to their studies experienced by a significant number of CSA students prior to attending the college, they develop their skills successfully and grow in confidence in working independently and together. In the best teaching, teachers draw effectively on a range of different strategies and approaches to build on these students' prior learning. Students say that they particularly enjoy their

PSHE programme, and highlight how these experiences have helped them adapt and develop their learning. Where teaching was satisfactory, the range of teaching strategies was more restricted and the pace of learning slowed. The college is addressing this through staff development.

On entry, students have a range of attainment and language and communication skills. The college screens all students when they enrol to identify their specific and individual needs. It provides a range of carefully structured, on-going practical support for students and good quality guidance for staff in meetings students' needs, particularly in developing their organisational skills. This contributes strongly to pupils' good achievement. Regular progress tests, assessments and mock examinations are a cornerstone of students' study programmes and provide teachers with regular performance data which they use to plan subsequent learning. Teachers mark students' completed work regularly and frequently discuss it with them during lessons. The college has an agreed policy for providing students with written feedback on the strengths and shortcomings of their work, and the identification of specific areas for development. However, practice is not always consistent and some marking gives students insufficient guidance. Similarly, whilst some teachers check the accuracy of students' notes, this practice is not consistent.

***Does the college meet the requirements for registration?***

Yes.

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

Provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is good. The college works hard at helping students to develop their self-knowledge, self-esteem and self-confidence. This provides a fundamental support to the progress that CSA students make academically.

Students at all levels feel valued as individuals and acknowledge the support provided by the tutor system. Although the nature of lessons seen during this examination period required a particularly focused use of time, students nevertheless had the opportunity of reflecting on some fundamental questions relating to moral and ethical issues, for example in advanced level lessons in religious education and psychology. The PSHE course taken by CSA students contains a range of opportunities for supporting their personal development and raising their self-esteem. A week-long residential course at an activity centre in Norfolk provides a range of valuable activities which further supports this development.

All students show a clear sense of right and wrong. This is supported through the thoughtfully planned PSHE provision for CSA students. Visitors to the college who have supported the course have included the police and a magistrate. Behaviour is good throughout the college. Students are made aware of the college's expectations in relation to their work and behaviour and on the whole respond very well. Younger students are encouraged to show initiative through the activities week and through effective questioning and demands on their response during lessons.

Students develop a satisfactory understanding of public institutions and services through a range of subjects including politics, history and PSHE. They have collected funds for charities, including International Care and Relief. Participation in the Young Enterprise scheme enables a group of students to meet those from other educational establishments. Activities organised by students include a social evening to which parents are invited. Students from different cultural heritages and backgrounds get on well together. Courses such as politics provide rich opportunities to broaden their knowledge of different cultures, views and attitudes. There are good opportunities for students of different cultures to mix socially, for example, for CSA students, through the activities week and for advanced level students through events such as punting on the river and an annual ball. Nevertheless, some older students indicate that they would appreciate some more structured opportunities to mix socially across different cultural groups.

Discussions with CSA students and lesson observations show that many students have clearly made enormous strides in their attitudes and social responses during their initial year at the college. Students frequently demonstrated a thoughtfulness in their responses to questions and their behaviour towards others and consideration of their feelings.

***Does the college meet the requirements for registration?***

Yes.

### **3. The welfare, health and safety of the students**

The college makes good provision for the welfare, health and safety of its students. Policies, including those for health and safety, risk assessments for educational visits, First Aid, child protection, behaviour and the prevention of bullying, are comprehensive and implemented successfully. The college has good arrangements for regularly monitoring, reviewing and revising its policies and day-to-day practice.

There are good arrangements for the induction of new students. The college promptly identifies the individual's particular needs and responds quickly to them. For CSA students, a week's residential visit to an activities centre is pivotal in developing relationships, team work and trust. Good and effective working relationships between staff and students are the foundation for the college's high quality pastoral provision. Communication between staff is efficient and effective, and personal tutors meet regularly with their students to discuss and resolve any concerns. Students say that the staff are approachable and responsive, and that they appreciate the mutual respect and friendly atmosphere that underpins lessons.

The college's policy on sanctions and rewards is clear, and is considered fair and reasonable by students. Termly awards celebrate students' efforts and personal progress and help to promote their confidence and sense of responsibility, reinforced by high expectations. Students behave well and move around the college in a sensible and safe manner. Where students' actions fall short of the comprehensive code of conduct, staff take prompt and appropriate action, maintaining detailed records and involving personal tutors at each stage. Parents and carers are involved

at an early stage in any serious disciplinary matters and the college maintains appropriate records of actions taken.

The admission register complies with statutory requirements. Teachers take attendance registers at the start of each lesson and staff promptly follow up student absences, systematically recording all information on a database, to which personal tutors have ready access. Methods of recording the attendance of CSA students do not comply fully with statutory requirements. Supervision within the college is effective but arrangements for monitoring those students who leave the premises to attend off-site activities or for other reasons are less clear.

Fire alarms are regularly tested, and include periodic, timed evacuations of the college buildings. Records are comprehensive and the Fire Officer's recommendations have been acted upon promptly. The college has undertaken a detailed survey of its accommodation and has drawn up a comprehensive three-year access plan.

The college has regard to the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools. An inspection of boarding provision by the National Care Standards Commission took place in November 2004 and the college has responded to the report's recommendations.

***Does the college meet the requirements for registration?***

*The college meets most, but not all, of the requirements for registration.*

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

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

- *improve the monitoring of the supervision of students who leave the college premises during the teaching day (paragraph 3(7)); and*
- *make arrangements for registration at the start of each session for all CSA students in accordance with the Education (Pupil Registration) Regulations 1995 (paragraph 3(9)).*

#### **4. The suitability of the proprietor and staff**

There are clear procedures established for ensuring that all new teaching and non-teaching staff are checked with the appropriate authority to verify their suitability to work with CSA students prior to them taking up their responsibilities. Administration is very thorough in this respect. Although the college is aware of its responsibilities with respect to most aspects of the requirements, procedures for checking the medical fitness of staff to undertake their duties are not yet firmly established.

***Does the college meet the requirements for registration?***

*No.*

***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:*

- *ensure that appropriate checks of new staff include confirmation of their medical fitness (paragraph 4(c)).*

**5. The suitability of the premises and accommodation**

The college's accommodation is in good condition and provides appropriate facilities for the number and needs of its students. A recent programme of refurbishment and redecoration provides suitable teaching accommodation, including specialist facilities for the sciences, information and communication technology and art.

Teaching rooms are of appropriate size for the groups of students, suitably furnished and equipped, and maintained in a tidy and clean manner. The quality of lighting in classrooms is good and the college closely follows guidance about the use of computers and other equipment. The college undertakes regular health and safety inspections, and the management responds promptly to any concerns. There are interactive white boards in several teaching rooms and a programme to increase the provision is in place.

Students have good access to computers at break times and when facilities are not required for direct teaching. The reading room provides a suitable range of reference materials and study space. In addition, specific resources are available for loan or study from subject rooms.

There is satisfactory provision for students' social recreation and the college has had appropriate regard to the latest statutory inspection of the catering facilities. There is a pleasant grassed area adjacent to the college available for students' use and there are regular, timetabled sessions for using sports facilities in a neighbouring independent school.

Toilet facilities are well maintained and ventilated. The college provides facilities for students who are ill but these lack a washbasin. The college does not currently have any students on roll with physical disabilities. Its disability action plan identifies priorities in adapting the premises to meet the needs of wheelchair users, and the college has obtained the landlord's consent to carry out these works.

***Does the college meet the requirements for registration?***

*The college meets all the requirements except one.*

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

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

- *provide a washbasin in each room used by students who are ill (paragraph 5(l)).*

## **6. The quality of information for parents and other partners**

The college communicates well with parents. It is entirely clear about all the information that it is required to provide to all parents, and prospective parents, and how it should be distributed. Extensive information is available to inform parents, prospective parents and students about the college and its courses. Without exception, parents who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire agreed that the college keeps them well informed about the progress being made by their children.

The prospectus and website clearly indicate the college's aims and ethos. All the required information on policies and procedures is provided, including details about college expectations relating to admissions, bullying, child protection and behaviour, and sanctions adopted in the case of misbehaviour.

The quality of reports to parents is good. The college provides the parents of CSA students with a progress report for each of the three terms of the academic year. These reports provide helpful information about levels of effort and attainment, and include advice on improvement. They focus well on the skills that students have developed. Contributions by teachers, in particular the summative reports provided by the year tutor, whilst clear about weaknesses, are positive and encouraging in tone. Discussions with students show that they generally respond well to this approach and the feedback provided.

***Does the college meet the requirements for registration?***

Yes.

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

The college has a clear policy for handling complaints which allows for them to be considered on an informal basis initially, but provides for more formal procedures and settings should they be required. According to pre-inspection questionnaires returned, parents of students said that they both understand the college's procedures for handling complaints and that they feel comfortable about approaching the college with questions, suggestions or problems.

***Does the college meet the requirements for registration?***

Yes.

## COLLEGE DETAILS

Name of college:	Mander Portman Woodward (MPW)
	Cambridge
DfES Number:	873/6017
Type of college:	Fifth and Sixth Form College
Status:	Independent
Age range of students:	14 - 21 years
Gender of students:	Mixed
Number on roll (full-time students):	Boys: 33      Girls: 37      Total: 70
Number on roll (part-time students):	Boys: 9      Girls: 18      Total: 27
Number of boarders:	Boys: 13      Girls: 17      Total: 30
Annual fees (day students):	£2,580 - £14,070
Annual fees (boarders):	£7,080 - £18,570
Address of college:	3 - 4 Brookside Cambridge CB2 1JE
Telephone number:	01223 350158
Fax number:	01223 366429
Email address:	enquiries@cambridge.mpw.co.uk
Headteacher:	Mr Nick Marriott
Proprietor:	Mander Portman Woodward Ltd
Reporting Inspector:	Mr Mike Thirkell, HMI
Date of inspection:	5 - 8 June 2006

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