



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

Progress Monitoring Inspection Report

Abbotsholme School

October 2022

School's details

School	Abbotsholme School			
DfE number	830/6005			
Address	Abbotsholme School Rocester Uttoxeter Staffordshire ST14 5BS			
Telephone number	01889 590217			
Email address	enquiries@abbotsholme.co.uk			
Headmaster	Mr Simon Ruscoe-Price			
Proprietor	Mrs Tong Zhou			
Age range	2 to 18			
Number of pupils on roll	299			
	Day pupils	217	Boarders	82
	EYFS	50	Juniors	59
	Seniors	136	Sixth Form	54
Date of inspection	6 October and 13 October 2022			

1. Introduction

Characteristics of the school

- 1.1 Founded in 1889 and situated in rural Derbyshire, Abbotsholme School is an independent co-educational day and boarding school. The school was purchased in 2017 by Achieve Education, a company registered in China which has responsibility for oversight. The school is assisted in governance by an advisory board of directors. The school has identified 98 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), and 7 pupils have an education, health and care (EHC) plan. English is an additional language (EAL) for 30 pupils. The previous inspection was an additional inspection in March 2022.

Purpose of the inspection

- 1.2 This was an unannounced additional inspection at the request of the Department for Education (DfE) which focused on the school's compliance with the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 (ISSRs) and the National Minimum Standards for Boarding 2015. Inspectors returned to the school after an initial day of inspection on 6 October following receipt of additional, pertinent information and the receipt of additional concerns. The inspection was focused in the senior school.

Regulations which were the focus of the inspection	Team judgements
Part 3, paragraphs 7 (safeguarding) and 8 (safeguarding of boarders); NMS 8	Not met
Part 3, paragraph 16 (risk assessment); NMS 9	Met
Part 4, paragraph 18 to 21 (suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors); NMS 19	Not met
Part 6, paragraph 32(1)(c) (provision of information)	Met
Part 8, paragraph 34 (quality of leadership and management); NMS 2	Not met

2. Inspection findings

Welfare, health and safety of pupils – safeguarding [ISSR Part 3, paragraphs 7 & 8; NMS 8]

Safeguarding policy

- 2.1 The school meets the requirements.
- 2.2 The school has an appropriate policy for safeguarding which provides suitable arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils at the school.

Safeguarding implementation

- 2.3 The school does not meet the standards.
- 2.4 The school's safeguarding arrangements incorporate all of the changes made to the government's statutory guidance, *Keeping Children Safe in Education* in September 2022. Staff have received suitable training from an external consultant. Staff understand that safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is everyone's responsibility. However, actions show that staff do not always put their understanding into practice.
- 2.5 There have been delays in reporting to the Teaching Regulation Agency (TRA) and the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) in the case of staff who have been dismissed or would have been dismissed had they not resigned. In the past, where serious allegations have been made about a member of staff, investigations have taken place prior to consultation with the local authority's designated officer (LADO). This is contrary to statutory guidance.
- 2.6 From September, the designated safeguarding lead (DSL) has become a member of the senior leadership team. They now manage safeguarding concerns effectively. A new online system for recording safeguarding concerns has been implemented, and staff have been trained in its use. A similar system for reporting low-level concerns about staff has also been implemented. Record keeping has improved and now shows follow-up actions including the recording and monitoring of the ongoing risk to pupils involved in serious incidents. Pupils confirmed that they are able to share concerns they may have, receive a response and that action is taken where necessary.
- 2.7 Since September 2022, there has been a significant lack of understanding with regard to the recruitment of staff and the necessary checks. Members of staff have started work in school before criminal record checks have been applied for, and these staff were not checked against the barred list. This check had been undertaken by the end of the second inspection visit indicating that no person is barred from working with children. The failing indicates a lack of understanding of senior leaders with regard to the transferability of DBS checks and a lack of oversight of recruitment by the proprietor. Not all those engaged in recruitment processes in the school have received sufficient training to understand and implement the statutory requirements for staff recruitment.
- 2.8 The proprietor's review of safeguarding remains insufficiently rigorous. It failed to identify and remedy weaknesses in the recruitment processes and the fact that timely referrals had not been made to the DBS and TRA.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils – risk assessment [ISSR Part 3, paragraph 16; NMS 9]

- 2.9 The school meets the standards.
- 2.10 The school has an appropriate risk assessment policy. Individual risk assessments adequately identify risk for activities, areas of the school's campus and individual circumstances. Risk assessments are reviewed, and appropriate action taken.

- 2.11 Following an incident, the school implemented a thorough review and risk assessment of its security and boarding arrangements. Shortcomings were identified in the school's security system, and regular maintenance of the school's alarm systems has resulted. New full-time boarding staff, who have no teaching commitment, have been appointed. Sleeping accommodation for a member of staff has been arranged in the sixth-form complex to provide greater assurance. Boarders' presence in the boarding houses is checked on a suitable number of occasions before lights out.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors [ISSR Part 4, paragraphs 18 – 21; NMS 19]

- 2.12 The school does not meet all of the standards.
- 2.13 In the case of the most recent staff appointed, the school did not commence an application for a criminal record check until after the person had started work in the school and the date of this check was not recorded in the school's single central register (SCR) of appointments.
- 2.14 The school's recruitment procedures are implemented effectively with regard to checks of supply staff and the proprietor. The identity of new members of staff is checked, as is their right to work in the UK. Where appropriate, the school checks a person's qualifications and that they have not been prohibited from teaching or from managing a school. For those who have worked or lived abroad, checks with the appropriate authorities are carried out. The school checks for any unexplained gaps in employment. At least two references are obtained before the person starts work at the school, and a check is made to ensure the person is medically fit to undertake their role.

Provision of information [ISSR Part 6, paragraph 32(1)(c)]

- 2.15 The school meets the requirements for providing information relating to safeguarding to parents. Particulars of the arrangements for safeguarding are published on the school's website.

Quality of leadership and management [ISSR Part 8, paragraph 34; NMS 2]

- 2.16 The school does not meet the standards.
- 2.17 Whilst there have been improvements in the management of safeguarding since the previous inspection, the proprietor has not ensured that the school's senior leaders have the skills and knowledge necessary to fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the standards are met consistently and pupils' wellbeing is actively promoted. Oversight of the school's recruitment procedures is lacking. Leaders do not understand or follow the correct procedures should an allegation be made against a member of staff or should that member of staff be dismissed.

3. Regulatory action points

3.1 The school does not meet all of the requirements of the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 and the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools 2022 and should take immediate action to remedy deficiencies as detailed below.

ISSR Part 3, Welfare, health and safety, paragraphs 7 and 8; NMS 8

- Senior leaders must consult the LADO before undertaking their own investigation when serious allegations are made about a member of staff, and this must be done within 24 hours of the allegation being made [paragraphs 7(a) and (b), 8(a) and (b); NMS 8.1].
- Senior leaders must inform the DBS without delay and consider whether to refer the matter to the TRA when allegations against staff are substantiated and the person is dismissed, resigns or otherwise ceases to provide his or her services [paragraphs 7(a) and (b), 8(a) and (b); NMS 8.1].
- Where a DBS certificate is not available before a person starts work in school, or the school accepts a DBS certificate from a previous employment within the preceding three months at another school in England, a check must be made against the barred list [paragraphs 7(a) and (b), 8(a) and (b); NMS 8.1].
- Ensure that all those involved in the recruitment and employment of staff to work with children have received sufficient training to enable them to understand statutory requirements for staff recruitment [paragraphs 7(a) and (b), 8(a) and (b); NMS 8.1].
- Ensure that the proprietor's review of safeguarding is sufficiently rigorous to ensure that weaknesses are identified and remedied, including those in recruitment procedures [paragraphs 7(a) and (b), 8(a) and (b); NMS 8.1].

ISSR Part 4, Suitability of staff, paragraphs 18 and 21; NMS 19

- Ensure that an application for an enhanced criminal record check is made to the DBS before a person starts working at the school, and the date when that check is seen is recorded in the SCR, unless that person has worked in a school or maintained school in England in the preceding three months [paragraphs 18(2)(d) and 21(3)(a)(v); NMS 19.1 and, for the same reason, paragraph 18(2)(f)].

ISSR Part 8, Quality of leadership and management, paragraph 34; NMS 2

- Ensure that leaders and managers demonstrate the good skills and knowledge necessary to fulfil their responsibilities effectively, so that the standards are met consistently, and pupils' wellbeing is actively promoted [paragraph 34(1)(a), (b) and (c); NMS 2.1, 2.2, 2.4, 2.5 and 2.8].

4. Summary of evidence

- 4.1 On 6 October, inspectors held discussions with the head, senior leaders and other members of staff and met with the proprietor's onsite representative. They visited different areas of the school and talked with groups of pupils. They scrutinised a range of documentation, records and policies.
- 4.2 On 13 October, inspectors held discussions with the proprietor's onsite representative, the bursar, the DSL and the head of boarding. They scrutinised a range of documentation, records and policies.

Inspectors

Mr Graham Sims	Reporting inspector
Mrs Vivien Sergeant	Assistant reporting inspector
Mr Jonathan Dunn	Assistant reporting inspector