

# School inspection report

16 to 18 April 2024

## **Abbotsholme School**

Rocester

Uttoxeter

Staffordshire

ST14 5BS

The Independent Schools Inspectorate is appointed by the Department for Education to inspect association independent schools in England. Our inspections report on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards and other applicable regulatory requirements are met, collectively referred to in this report as 'the Standards'.

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## Summary of inspection findings

1. Governors visit the school regularly. They understand and uphold the ethos of the school. A carefully considered strategic development plan, linked to leaders' self-evaluation of the school, supports the school's aims. Governors regularly review all aspects of provision. They ensure that leaders are well-qualified to carry out their responsibilities, augmenting their knowledge and experience through links with professional bodies.
2. Leaders, together with governors, prioritise the safety and wellbeing of pupils. All staff complete a rigorous safeguarding programme and receive updates throughout the year. Staff are vigilant and report any safeguarding concerns swiftly. Leaders make referrals to external agencies, as appropriate, within the required time frames. As a result, there is an effective culture of safeguarding.
3. Leaders and managers implement a strategic, comprehensive approach to identifying and managing potential risks to pupils' wellbeing.
4. There is a broad and balanced curriculum, including in the early years. This allows pupils of all abilities, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and who have English as an additional language (EAL), to develop an appropriate range of skills and knowledge. Pupils benefit from a range of vocational qualifications alongside GCSE and A-level options. Supported by suitably broad careers guidance, these prepare pupils to follow an appropriate variety of pathways after school.
5. Leaders have recently introduced new measures designed to ensure that pupils are given appropriately ambitious academic targets and are supported to achieve these. However, the impact of these measures is yet to be fully realised.
6. Leaders provide many opportunities for pupils to participate in an extensive outdoor education programme. Pupils develop a range of aptitudes from this programme. This outdoor programme is augmented by a number of sporting opportunities and other extra-curricular activities which allows pupils to develop new skills and interests.
7. Leaders provide a number of platforms, including regular meetings, for pupils to share their ideas and requests. Pupils are aware of initiatives arising from these through feedback in assemblies. Nevertheless, a small number of pupils, including boarders, do not feel listened to as much as possible.
8. Early years leaders ensure that children are well supported. The curriculum is well planned and adapted to suit the needs of each individual as necessary. This ensures that children flourish. Children make good progress and are happy in school because they feel well known and safe.
9. Mutual respect is one of the key values of the school. Pupils understand this and behave in a polite and friendly manner to all in the school community. Their conduct exemplifies their recognition of the importance of embracing diversity.
10. Pupils are keen to serve others, both in the school and the wider community. They willingly take up opportunities to contribute to school life, to the local community and to overseas projects. These enable pupils to develop their inter-personal skills and to broaden their outlook.

## The extent to which the school meets the Standards

- Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance are met.
- Standards relating to the quality of education, training and recreation are met.
- Standards relating to pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing are met.
- Standards relating to pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society are met.
- Standards relating to safeguarding are met.

### Recommended next steps

Leaders should:

- further strengthen the use of pupil voice so that pupils, including boarders, feel listened to and are confident their views can help to shape the school community
- ensure that recently introduced initiatives designed to support pupils of all abilities to fully develop their academic potential are embedded across the curriculum.

## Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

11. Governors ensure that leaders' knowledge of regulations and effective practice is current. Leaders have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development, based on comprehensive self-evaluation. This, together with professional dialogue with other educational bodies and agencies, informs their decision-making and longer term strategic planning across all areas of the school.
12. Safeguarding is of central importance to governors and leaders. Leaders ensure that safeguarding is robust through a mandatory training programme which includes regular updates for all staff during the school year. Leaders maintain well-developed links with external agencies. They contact them as necessary, recognising which circumstances should give rise to a referral.
13. Leaders actively promote pupils' wellbeing, including through encouraging a love of the natural world in line with the school's founding principles. They ensure that all groups of pupils benefit from a curriculum which includes a programme of outdoor education, agricultural and equestrian activities. These experiences benefit pupils' physical and mental health.
14. Leaders' assessment and management of risk across all areas of school life is effective. The wide variety of educational activities on offer, alongside residential and overseas visits, are thoroughly assessed before commencement. Leaders clearly identify and manage any potential risk to the wellbeing of vulnerable pupils through individual care plans. Boarding house risk assessments are well thought out.
15. Leaders show good knowledge of effective boarding practice. Boarding staff are given appropriate induction to fulfil their roles effectively. They ensure that international pupils are fully integrated into the boarding community, as are those who flexi-board. Leaders arrange weekly boarding meetings so that pupils may raise ideas and voice their opinions. However, a few pupils feel that they are not listened to as fully as possible.
16. Staff, including boarding staff, are readily contactable by parents. As a result, most concerns are dealt with quickly. Complaints are recorded methodically and responded to appropriately within policy timelines. Parents' meetings are held regularly, and leaders provide detailed academic and pastoral reports to parents. All other required information is made available to parents, including through the school's website. Leaders provide required information to the local authority with regard to any pupils who receive funding from them.
17. Leaders of the early years setting prioritise the wellbeing of the children, who are cared for in a cheerful, encouraging, safe environment. The children are supervised effectively because staff are appropriately trained in safeguarding and identification of risk. Early years staff monitor and self-evaluate their practice regularly. Early years parents have continuous access to the progress of their children through a collaborative digital platform.
18. Governors and leaders ensure that they fulfil their duties under equality legislation. They support and promote accessibility for pupils, including for pupils who have SEND.

## The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance

**19. All the relevant Standards are met.**

## Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

20. Leaders throughout the school ensure that pupils receive education that covers all key educational areas of learning. The curriculum is wide ranging and allows pupils to study for qualifications which reflect their abilities and interests. For example, in the sixth form recently introduced A-level subjects cater for particular interests whilst BTEC agricultural qualifications are provided for those who intend to follow a career in this area. Most pupils attain results at GCSE, BTEC and A level in line with or above those expected for their starting points.
21. Leaders have recently introduced systems of accountability across subject departments in the senior school. This means that data is scrutinised knowledgeably by most departments to plan schemes of work designed to enable pupils, including those with higher prior attainment, those who have SEND and those who have EAL, to fulfil their potential. Pupils' progress is tracked and appropriately ambitious targets are set. However, these systems of accountability are not yet fully embedded across the curriculum.
22. Pupils are given individualised attention and support within small classes as a matter of course. Teachers' well-structured lesson planning, together with their good subject knowledge, enthusiastic delivery and understanding of pupils' needs, ensures that pupils are fully engaged in lessons. Pupils are challenged to think and stretch their understanding, building on previous learning. There are usually extension or challenge tasks for pupils with higher prior attainment. For example, in English, pupils are encouraged to be suitably ambitious in their personal reading choices, whilst in Spanish, pupils are regularly set extra linguistic challenges.
23. Teaching fosters pupils' independence, as seen in art where sketchbooks show high levels of self-motivation, individual research and analysis. It also encourages the sharing of ideas. For example, pupils in a drama lesson listened to each other's evaluations of their work and used these to improve their performance. In a personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education lesson, pupils shared their views on the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the 1980s, focusing on the scientific, cultural, social and political ramifications.
24. Leaders and staff identify the needs of pupils who have SEND and focus on meeting these through carefully personalised individual support plans. Teaching makes use of effective strategies for pupils. Lessons are adapted to help pupils learn effectively whilst also boosting pupil self-esteem.
25. Leaders identify the linguistic needs of pupils who have EAL as they arrive in school so that pupils are quickly supported with specialist tuition to improve their English when required. In the classroom, teachers ensure that pupils who have EAL understand the focus of the lesson by providing them with one-to-one explanations and key words in their native language, when necessary.
26. Teachers' written feedback to pupils is clearly focused so that pupils are challenged to think about how to improve their knowledge and understanding. Pupils value this approach because it is personalised and makes them more self-reliant over time. Those moving on to higher education are well prepared for the next stage through the study skills that they have learnt in school.
27. All pupils from Year 3 to Year 9 undertake a carousel of extra-curricular activities which enables them to develop their performing arts, outdoor education, agricultural, animal husbandry and equestrian skills. Outdoor education skills continue to be developed as pupils move through the school as all pupils from Reception onwards undertake autumn 'hike' activities and a summer camp

in a variety of places throughout the UK. Pupils speak of these adventures with enthusiasm, recognising a growth in resilience and self-confidence and the benefits of teamwork, which these experiences bring.

28. Leaders in the early years use observations and assessment data to carefully target any learning gaps and ensure a suitable personalised learning pathway for each child. This results in children making good progress. Staff encourage children to be creative thinkers, as seen in literacy and music activities. The curriculum includes outdoor pursuits. Children gain confidence through their horse riding experiences and a broader understanding of the natural world through their visits to the school farm.

### **The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to the quality of education, training and recreation**

29. **All the relevant Standards are met.**

## Section 3: Pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing

30. Leaders understand that healthy physical and emotional development is an important aspect of educational provision. Pupils' self-esteem, confidence and resilience are fostered, in part, through the outdoor education provided, particularly when taking on responsible roles, such as in the lambing season. In the early years, the effective key person system ensures emotional security and wellbeing for these children.
31. There is a wide-ranging and effective PSHE curriculum, supplemented by a range of external speakers. Pupils learn about topics as varied as healthy eating to institutionalised racism, which allow them to better understand how to support their own emotional and physical wellbeing, as well as important issues in society. The school's promotion of positive values encourages and enables pupils to respect cultural differences and identities.
32. A comprehensive age-appropriate programme of relationships and sex education (RSE) is taught throughout the school. In the prep school, pupils are taught about healthy relationships from Reception upwards. Because some prep classes include mixed year groups, older pupils are encouraged and enabled to act as positive role models. They are encouraged to share their experience of fostering positive friendships with younger pupils. In the senior school, specialist teaching develops pupils' understanding of a range of current topics such as the effect of sexualised images in the media and the importance of consent.
33. Robust anti-bullying and behaviour policies are understood and implemented well by leaders and staff. Bullying is rare, and any cases that arise are dealt with swiftly and sympathetically. The behaviour around the school and in class demonstrates that pupils are friendly and respectful of teachers, each other and the environment. Pupils feel comfortable raising concerns about behaviour and are confident these will be taken seriously. The school's approach to behavioural issues guides pupils to learn to take responsibility for their actions.
34. Pupils particularly enjoy the supportive relationships that they develop in the boarding houses. Evening and weekend boarding activities are provided and pupils are encouraged to participate in these. Boarders' personal possessions are protected efficiently. Boarders can always contact a member of staff, including at night. Sixth-form boarders learn to manage domestic tasks through living in specially designed cabins. They recognise that this arrangement helps to set them up for independent living after school whilst still benefiting from house staff support and advice.
35. A medical centre is open throughout the school day and staffed by suitably qualified personnel. An appropriate number of staff are trained in first aid to support pupils' needs, including in the boarding houses. Care plans are in place to support individuals who need particular provision. In the early years all staff are trained in paediatric first aid so that the youngest children's health needs may be met. Leaders provide support for pupils' mental health. For example, an independent listener visits the school weekly and pupils have access to a school counsellor.
36. The school offers pupils the opportunity to pursue a wide range of sports. Teams are composed effectively to encourage confident bonds between year groups. In addition to the more traditional team sports, pupils may take part in boxing, horse riding and climbing, for example, in order to learn new physical skills and grow in self-confidence.

37. Informed by external expertise, leaders ensures that procedures and policies for health and safety matters and fire safety all meet requirements. Regular checks, and arrangements for reporting faults and their correction, are all in place. Attendance and admission registers are recorded and stored in line with legislation. Leaders monitor attendance and follow up any absenteeism. The school reports to the local authority when pupils join or leave the school at non-standard times, as required. Premises and accommodation are suitable and efficiently maintained. Pupils of all ages are appropriately supervised throughout the school day, including recreation times, and in the boarding houses through efficient deployment of staff. This contributes towards pupils feeling safe in school.

### **The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing**

**38. All the relevant Standards are met.**

## Section 4: Pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society

39. Pupils show a clear appreciation of the importance of mutual respect for all. This core value of the school is promoted through assemblies and tutor time so that pupils of all ages understand its worth. The PSHE curriculum highlights the importance of mutual respect and pupils recognise that it is essential to acknowledge and respect differences. Diversity is celebrated within the school community and inclusion is promoted. In the early years, children are steered sensitively to learn to share and be tolerant of others' needs.
40. The school has a careers programme in place for all senior pupils, based round national benchmarks, whilst the oldest in the prep school are prepared well for their move into Year 7. Those in the early years are supported in the transition to the next stage of their education. Pupils in the sixth form receive effective support that informs their decisions about post-school pathways. For example, pupils benefit from advice on practical agricultural work experience which supports career ambitions. Pupils also develop an understanding of financial responsibility in a range of lessons. Combined, these measures ensure that inter-personal skills are developed alongside knowledge, qualifications and experiences to prepare pupils for the world of work.
41. Pupils gain an understanding of British institutions and the rule of law through tutor sessions, assemblies and PSHE and citizenship lessons. Topics includes a focus on parliament and the duties of its members, and the roles of voluntary agencies in British society. Pupils also learn about legal and moral issues, including those surrounding organ donation and euthanasia, for example. Democracy in action is experienced through the election of pupils by their peers to positions of responsibility within the school community.
42. Leaders encourage pupils to take on such responsibilities through prefectship and membership of the school council, the boarders' forum and the food committee. Initiatives put in place in response to pupils' requests include the installation of a new gym, the prep school gardening club and first aid training for Year 6 pupils. Pupils are encouraged to express their views in wider discussion with all staff and the senior leadership team. However, not all pupils feel as if their opinions are considered in helping to develop the school community.
43. There are a wide range of opportunities for service in the community within The Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme (DofE). All pupils take the bronze award in Year 9 and a large number of older pupils go on to succeed at silver and gold level. Pupils care about helping others. Links with the local community allow pupils to support a care home and local food bank. They benefit from taking on mentoring roles in the prep school, such as listening to early readers. Helping out on the school farm allows pupils to develop a sense of responsibility to living creatures as well as a range of skills, including teamwork and decision-making.
44. The school belongs to the Round Square network which aims to encourage pupils throughout the world to work together to learn about each other's countries and cultures. Pupils are committed to raising funds for Round Square projects by working in the café and other initiatives. Through membership of this organisation, pupils contribute to communities across the world, volunteering for maintenance work and teaching activities in schools in Kenya and Morocco, for example. Pupils have also raised funds to sponsor the education of two children in sub-Saharan Africa. Through these activities, pupils expand their world view and contribute positively to the lives of others.

45. Pupils enjoy being involved in local events; they contribute to events organised by a national federation for young farmers and events such as county shows, ploughing competitions and the Samuel Johnson memorial commemoration. These experiences develop pupils' understanding of their environment and appreciation of its customs and culture.

**The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society**

**46. All the relevant Standards are met.**

## Safeguarding

47. Governors monitor the school's safeguarding arrangements effectively, to ensure that they are suitable, including by carrying out termly reviews of safeguarding procedures.
48. The safeguarding policy reflects the requirements of current statutory guidance and is implemented efficiently and effectively. Leaders with designated safeguarding responsibilities follow suitable procedures and acts promptly when any safeguarding concerns are raised, including any relating to allegations against staff. Leaders contact relevant external agencies when appropriate.
49. Those with designated safeguarding lead responsibilities are appropriately trained for their role. All staff receive safeguarding training on joining the school, which is updated at least termly. Staff understand the required child protection procedures, including those relating to online safety and the risks posed by radicalisation and extremism. They understand how to recognise and report a safeguarding concern. Leaders implement an effective internet filtering and monitoring system to support pupils' safety when online.
50. Pupils feel safe at school and are taught effectively about how to stay safe online. They are able to identify a trusted member of staff to whom they can turn and are confident that any concerns they have will be treated seriously.
51. From the initial advertisement onwards, the recruitment process has safeguarding at its heart. Leaders are trained in safer recruitment practice. Appropriate recruitment processes are thorough and consistently followed. All required safer recruitment checks are recorded accurately on a single central register of appointments.

### The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

- 52. All the relevant Standards are met.**

## School details

<b>School</b>	Abbotsholme School
<b>Department for Education number</b>	830/6005
<b>Address</b>	Abbotsholme School Rocester Uttoxeter Staffordshire ST14 5BS
<b>Phone number</b>	01889 590217
<b>Email address</b>	enquiries@abbotsholme.co.uk
<b>Website</b>	www.abbotsholme.co.uk
<b>Proprietor</b>	Mrs Tong Zhou
<b>Chair</b>	Mr Michael Farmer
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Helen Wilkinson
<b>Age range</b>	2 to 18
<b>Number of pupils</b>	234
<b>Number of boarding pupils</b>	45
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	7 June 2023

## Information about the school

53. Abbotsholme School is an independent co-educational day and boarding school situated in rural Derbyshire. It was founded in 1889 and purchased in 2017 by Achieve Education, a company registered in the UK which has responsibility for oversight. The school is assisted in governance by an advisory board of directors. The current headteacher took up her position in September 2023.
54. Boarding is offered for pupils aged 10 years and upwards. Boarders are accommodated in three boarding houses on the school site.
55. There are currently 54 children in the early years setting, comprising one Nursery and one Reception class.
56. The school has identified 66 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Six pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
57. English is an additional language for 20 pupils.
58. The school states its aims are to provide knowledge to help everyone achieve and succeed to the best of their individual academic ability; to have an understanding of the natural environment and the importance of protecting it; to take on challenges which build strength and test courage, as well as providing a stimulating and enjoyable experience; and to provide cultural enrichment to widen perspective and to develop awareness of responsibilities to others.

## Inspection details

### Inspection dates

16 to 18 April 2024

59. A team of four inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

60. Inspection activities included:

- observation of lessons, some in conjunction with school leaders
- observation of registration periods and assemblies
- observation of a sample of extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection
- discussions with the chair and other governors
- discussions with the head, school leaders, managers and other members of staff
- discussions with pupils
- visits to the learning support area and facilities for physical education
- visits to boarding houses accompanied by pupils and staff
- scrutiny of samples of pupils' work
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

61. The inspection team considered the views of pupils, members of staff and parents who responded to ISI's pre-inspection surveys.

**How are association independent schools in England inspected?**

- The Department for Education is the regulator for independent schools in England.
- ISI is approved by the Secretary of State for Education to inspect independent schools in England, which are members of associations in membership of the Independent Schools Council.
- ISI inspections report to the Department for Education on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards, the EYFS statutory framework requirements, the National Minimum Standards for boarding schools and any other relevant standards are met.
- For more information, please visit **[www.isi.net](http://www.isi.net)**.

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