



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

FOCUSED COMPLIANCE AND EDUCATIONAL QUALITY INSPECTION REPORTS

ABERCORN SCHOOL

FEBRUARY/MARCH 2018



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SCHOOL'S DETAILS

School	Abercorn School			
DfE number	213/6364			
Address	Abercorn School 28 Abercorn Place London NW8 9XP			
Telephone number	020 7286 4785			
Email address	admin@abercornschoo.com			
Headmaster	Mr Benedict Dunhill			
Chairman of directors	Mr John Clarke			
Age range	2½ to 13			
Number of pupils on roll	336			
	Boys	212	Girls	124
	EYFS	116	Pre-prep, Years 1-3	121
	Prep, Years 4-8	99		
Inspection dates	27 February to 1 March 2018			

1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

About the school

- 1.1 Abercorn School is a co-educational day school for pupils aged between two and a half and thirteen years. Established in 1987, it is accommodated on three sites near the centre of London. The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), for children up to the age of five, is based at Abercorn Place; the pre-preparatory department, for pupils up to the age of eight, is based in premises on Marylebone Road; and the preparatory department is based at Portland Place. The school is owned by Abercorn Education Limited whose five directors, one of whom is the founder, administer the school as a governing body. The headmaster took up his appointment in September 2015.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.2 The school aims to offer a broad and stimulating range of academic, cultural, creative and sporting pursuits. It also seeks to provide clear moral guidelines and to share with parents in the intellectual and moral development of their children. The school aims to ensure that pupils have the skills, integrity and attitude needed to contribute to the local and the wider community through charitable engagement and a respect for the environment.

About the pupils

- 1.3 Most pupils come from professional, diplomatic or business families living within a 3-mile radius of the school. About half the pupils are British; pupils of 37 different nationalities comprise the other half. Nationally standardised test data provided by the school indicate that the ability of the pupils is above average. The school has identified 32 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) which include dyslexia and sensory processing disorder, 11 of whom receive additional specialist help. No pupils have an education, health and care plan or a statement of special educational needs. English is an additional language (EAL) for 43 pupils, all of whom are supported by additional specialist help. Data used by the school have identified 10 pupils as being the most able in the school's population, and the curriculum is modified for them and for 26 other pupils because of their special talents in art, drama, music and sport.

2. REGULATORY COMPLIANCE INSPECTION

Preface

The registration authority for independent schools is the Department for Education (DfE), which directs inspection according to a specified frequency or at any time where the DfE has particular concerns about a school. The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is the body approved by the Secretary of State for the purpose of inspecting schools which are, or whose heads are, in membership of the associations which form the Independent Schools Council (ISC) and reporting on the extent to which they meet the Independent School Standards ('the standards') in the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014. Accordingly, inspection records whether the school meets each of these standards, which are arranged in eight Parts, each of which is divided into separate paragraphs. The inspection of schools that have early years settings not requiring registration similarly records whether the school complies with key provisions of the Early Years Foundation Stage statutory framework, and for registered settings the full range of the Early Years Foundation Stage provisions is considered. Additionally, the inspection reports on the school's accessibility plan under Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996. It comments on the progress made by the school in meeting the compliance action points set out in the school's most recent statutory inspection.

All association independent schools will have an inspection within three years from April 2016, in accordance with the Framework and DfE requirements. The inspection may be of COMPLIANCE ONLY or a combined inspection of EDUCATIONAL QUALITY AND COMPLIANCE depending on a number of factors, including findings from their most recent inspection. Schools judged not to meet the standards may also be subject to a progress monitoring visit before their next routine inspection. The progress monitoring visit will judge whether the school has taken the necessary action to meet any un-met standards identified at their previous inspection.

The inspection was also carried out under the arrangements of the ISC Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership.

This is a FOCUSED COMPLIANCE INSPECTION which was combined with an inspection of EDUCATIONAL QUALITY, the report of which appears later in this document. The COMPLIANCE inspection reports only on the school's compliance with the standards. The standards represent minimum requirements and judgements are given either as **met** or as **not met**. All schools are required to meet all the standards applicable to them. Where the minimum requirements are not met, this is clearly indicated in the relevant section of the report and the school is required to take the actions specified. In this focused compliance inspection, key regulations and standards have been inspected in detail. These are the regulations on safeguarding; measures to guard against bullying; arrangements for pupils' health and safety, arrangements to check the suitability of staff; the provision of information to parents; the handling of parents' complaints; and other related aspects of leadership and management. The remaining standards and requirements are deemed to continue to be met unless evidence to the contrary has been found.

Inspections do not include matters that are outside of the regulatory framework described above, such as: an exhaustive health and safety audit; compliance with data protection requirements; an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features; contractual arrangements with parents; an investigation of the financial viability of the school or its accounting procedures.

Inspectors may be aware of individual safeguarding concerns, allegations and complaints as part of the inspection process. Such matters will not usually be referred to specifically in published reports in this document but will have been considered by the team in reaching its judgements.

Links to the full regulations and requirements can be found here: [The Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#) and the Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework.

Key findings

- 2.1 The school meets the standards in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 and relevant requirements of the statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage, and associated requirements, and no further action is required as a result of this inspection.

PART 1 – Quality of education provided

- 2.2 The school uses its own framework to determine attainment, instead of the national framework.
- 2.3 The curriculum is documented, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work for the pupils and covers the required breadth of material. The teaching enables pupils to make good progress, encompasses effective behaviour management and is supported by suitable resources. A suitable framework for the assessment of pupils' performance is in place.
- 2.4 The standards relating to the quality of education [paragraphs 1–4] are met.**

PART 2 – Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

- 2.5 Principles and values are actively promoted which facilitate the personal development of pupils as responsible, tolerant, law-abiding citizens.
- 2.6 The standard relating to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development [paragraph 5] is met.**

PART 3 – Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 2.7 Arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils by means that pay due regard to current statutory guidance; good behaviour is promoted; bullying is prevented so far as reasonably practicable; health and safety requirements are met, including those relating to fire safety; provision is made for first aid. Pupils are properly supervised; admission and attendance registers are maintained, as required, and there is a strategic approach to risk assessment. A disability access plan is in place.
- 2.8 The standards relating to welfare, health and safety [paragraphs 6–16], the requirement of Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010, and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996 are met.**

PART 4 – Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

- 2.9 The school makes appropriate checks to ensure the suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors and a register is kept as required.
- 2.10 The standards relating to the suitability of those in contact with pupils at the school [paragraphs 17–21] are met.**

PART 5 – Premises of and accommodation at schools

- 2.11 Suitable toilet, changing and showering facilities for pupils and appropriate accommodation for their medical and therapy needs are provided. The premises are maintained to a standard commensurate with health and safety; acoustics and lighting are appropriate; water provision is adequate. Suitable outdoor space is provided for physical education and outdoor play.
- 2.12 The standards relating to the premises and accommodation [paragraphs 22–31] are met.**

PART 6 – Provision of information

2.13 A range of information is variously published, provided or made available to parents, inspectors and the Department for Education. These include details about the proprietor, the ethos of the school and the curriculum, and of the school's arrangements for admission, behaviour and exclusions, bullying, health and safety, first aid, details of the complaints procedure, and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year, and the provision for those with education, health and care plans or English as an additional language. They also include particulars of the school's academic performance during the preceding school year, and its results in public examinations, inspection reports and (for parents only) a report at least annually of their own child's progress. The safeguarding policy is posted on the school's website.

2.14 The standard relating to the provision of information [paragraph 32] is met.

PART 7 – Manner in which complaints are handled

2.15 Parental complaints, if any, are handled effectively through a three-stage process, (informal, formal and a hearing before a panel of three, one of whom is independent of the school). Each stage has clear time scales, and at the third stage the panel can make findings and recommendations which are communicated to the complainant. Records are kept appropriately, including of any action taken, whether or not a complaint is successful.

2.16 The standard relating to the handling of complaints [paragraph 33] is met.

PART 8 – Quality of leadership in and management of schools

2.17 The proprietor ensures that the leadership and management demonstrate good skills and knowledge, and fulfil their responsibilities effectively, so that the other standards are consistently met and they actively promote the well-being of the pupils.

2.18 The standard relating to leadership and management of the school [paragraph 34] is met.

3. EDUCATIONAL QUALITY INSPECTION

Preface

The **EDUCATIONAL QUALITY** inspection reports on the quality of the school's work. It focuses on the two key outcomes:

- The achievement of the pupils, including their academic development, and
- The personal development of the pupils.

Since the school was last inspected, the framework for inspection has changed. The current inspection framework uses different criteria and arrangements for grading from those used in previous inspection frameworks. The judgements made on this inspection are, therefore, not directly comparable to judgements made on previous inspections.

All independent schools are required to meet the requirements of the Independent School Standards. However, different inspectorates apply different frameworks that are suited to the different types of schools they inspect. The ISI terminology reflects quality judgements that are at least equivalent to those used by the national inspectorate, Ofsted. ISI reports do not provide a single overarching judgement for the school but instead give a clear judgement about key outcomes for pupils and information on the quality of the school's work.

Key findings

3.1 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.

- Pupils throughout the school make excellent academic progress over time, and levels of achievement are high.
- Pupils express themselves confidently and articulately.
- Pupils' attitude to all that they undertake is mature and positive.

3.2 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.

- Pupils successfully live up to the school's stated values.
- Pupils are self-aware and are able to consider themselves reflectively, in terms of their emotions and their behaviour.
- In this inclusive and caring community, pupils display a genuine concern and respect for others.

Recommendation

3.3 In the context of the excellent outcomes, the school is recommended to:

- Plan and implement a smoother academic transition from the EYFS to Year 1.

THE QUALITY OF PUPILS' ACADEMIC AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS

- 3.4 The quality of pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.
- 3.5 The school does not enter pupils for National Curriculum tests. Consequently, the pupils' attainment cannot be measured in relation to average performance in national tests but, on the evidence available, it is judged to be excellent in relation to national age-related expectations. Inspection evidence from observation of lessons, scrutiny of pupils' work and discussions with pupils supports this judgement. Throughout the school and in all subjects, academic attainment was found to be considerably in advance of that expected at the relevant levels of age and of stage of development. Furthermore, most of those leaving from Year 6 and Year 8 gain places to senior schools with demanding entrance requirements, with some being awarded entrance scholarships. Pupils make good and frequently excellent progress both in relation to their starting points and in comparison with pupils of similar ability. The scrutiny of pupils' written work showed marked progress and improvement over time. Less able pupils, and those with EAL or SEND, make excellent progress because they are extremely well supported both in class and also when receiving specialist help. More able pupils and those with particular talents are challenged in lessons through enrichment and extension tasks, so enabling them to achieve in line with their potential.
- 3.6 Pupils' strong academic progress owes much to excellent tracking and systematic monitoring, with well-focused intervention and remedial action taken where required. Governance, leadership and management have provided plentiful academic resources of high quality on all three sites, thus ensuring that pupils are able to use the working day profitably and productively. Individual pupils benefit greatly from the attention and support of teaching assistants, who are readily on hand to help with the mastery of a particular topic or discipline. Pupils interviewed said that they appreciate the help provided to them by teachers outside lessons. In their responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire, all of the pupils agreed that they are given the opportunity to learn and make good academic progress. A very small minority of pupils who responded to the questionnaire felt that they do not know how well they are doing in their subjects. Pupils interviewed, however, were clear that they are aware of their level of performance and progress, and of targets in individual subjects. The overwhelming majority of parents who responded to the questionnaire agreed that teaching enables their children to make good progress and to develop skills for the future
- 3.7 Pupils make strong progress in all academic disciplines. In accordance with the school's stated aim, the academic curriculum is broad, and it gives full value to the creative and performing arts. Pupils begin to learn French in the EYFS; as elsewhere, it is taught largely in French rather than in English. The programme of personal, social, health and economic education (PSHEE) is wide-ranging and carefully graduated to be appropriate to each age group. Pupils benefit from increasing amounts of specialist subject teaching as they move up the school. The progress and attainment of a small number of children is restricted when they transfer to Year 1 from the EYFS, as the curriculum, assessment and approaches to teaching are not always fully integrated.
- 3.8 Excellent teaching with strong subject knowledge and expertise leads to pupils achieving high levels of knowledge, skills and understanding across all areas of the curriculum. Exceptionally articulate, they display mature analytical skills and, in class, skilful questioning by staff produces reflective, higher-order responses. Pupils' problem-solving skills are greatly enhanced by teachers encouraging them to think independently and to make connections rather than providing the answers. During the inspection, strong conceptual understanding in mathematics and geography was observed. Pupils in a Year 2 science class were able to predict, discuss and interpret results and record them systematically, while young scientists in Year 3 displayed a secure mastery of terminology and method. Pupils with SEND gain confidence and make consequent academic improvement as a result of well-planned encouragement to express themselves orally. Throughout the school, pupils gain confidence from the many opportunities to speak and perform in public, class, assemblies, debate and on stage before their peers and in front of their parents.

- 3.9 Pupils' written work is of high quality and mostly neatly presented, illustrative of pride and care. At all ages, pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammar are of a high standard. Marking of work is conscientious, and pupils said that they find the written and verbal feedback valuable, with helpful pointers to further improvement. Across the school, pupils achieve excellent levels of numeracy, which they apply successfully in investigative and statistical work in subjects such as science and geography. Pupils achieve high standards of proficiency in information and communication technology (ICT); they become adept at coding and apply ICT fruitfully across the curriculum, from Reception classes using tablets to find answers to their own questions, to pupils in Year 1 absorbed in their research of animal habitats, to senior pupils confidently conducting scientific research and writing up investigations using spreadsheets.
- 3.10 Pupils enjoy and benefit from the school's programme of extra-curricular activities. Inspection evidence did not support the view of the few parents who said in their response to the questionnaire that there is not a good choice of extra-curricular activities. The school fulfils its intention to offer a broad range of cultural, creative and sporting pursuits. A wide range of extra-curricular choices, which includes cookery, ballet, musical theatre, chess and taekwondo, affords the pupils plenty of scope to develop their aptitudes and talents. Music flourishes at the school. All pupils benefit from the chance to learn a musical instrument, and the school has a strong record of success in instrumental examinations. Pupils may join one of the vocal ensembles, and choristers have enjoyed singing Evensong in Canterbury Cathedral and carols at Marylebone Station. Examinations in speech and drama were introduced in 2017; all the candidates achieved passes, the majority with distinction. Pupils have won awards in art and mathematics competitions. A good range of sports includes fencing, kickboxing and Eton fives. Pupils have participated in local, regional and national competitions in hockey, swimming, football, cross country and athletics, being highly placed in many events, as individuals and as teams. Through this provision of opportunities and the staff's enthusiastic support and coaching, pupils achieve fulfilment and gain great pleasure.
- 3.11 Pupils' horizons are broadened and their intellectual and cultural experience is enriched by the advantage taken of the school's situation in London. Pupils speak with enthusiasm about visits to world-class places of interest such as museums and galleries. Recent visitors to the school have included a wildlife photographer and writer on chess, while workshops have focused on Mexico, ancient Rome and origami. In the EYFS, visits to the theatre have generated consequent activities, in one case raising money to 'adopt' a tiger. A programme of residential trips from Year 3 upwards develops pupils' independence and social skills. Older pupils expressed delight at the production of *Julius Caesar* in Stratford and their residential visit to France. Recent trips abroad have also taken pupils to Iceland and Norway, and senior pupils' time at the school culminated in an exchange visit to Abercorn's sister school in New York. All of these ventures enhance the pupils' educational experience.
- 3.12 Throughout the school, the pupils display an excellent attitude to learning. They come into lessons expecting to work and to learn. In class, pupils apply themselves with evident enjoyment, keen to do well and eager to be challenged. They are attentive to their teachers and to one another. Enthusiastic participants in their lessons, they are responsive, readily offering answers and opinions articulately and confidently. They work conscientiously, displaying determination and perseverance. At all levels, pupils were observed to relish tackling problems. In the EYFS a spirit of enquiry and curiosity is developed by the 'kickstart' initiative, whereby the introduction of a new topic is accompanied by problem-solving and investigation, with the children leading the learning. Unafraid to make mistakes, pupils are comfortable in the company of their teachers and their peers, and they recognise that making mistakes helps them to learn. In pairs or groups, they co-operate extremely well, conscious of the value of working together towards common goals. Pupils participate in extra-curricular activities in a similarly spirited way, displaying a willing 'can do' approach to all that they undertake.

- 3.13 Both of the recommendations of the previous inspection have been successfully met. Parents of children in the EYFS are closely involved with their learning and development. For instance, every week a parent comes into the EYFS to read to the children; they are excited about who the 'mystery reader' will be and they are stimulated by the experience. At all ages, pupils benefit from parents' close engagement with the life of the school; during the inspection, World Book Day was celebrated in an assembly where four parents brought in their favourite books and, with their children, read passages from them. The school successfully meets its aim to share with parents the intellectual development of their children.

THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

- 3.14 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 3.15 As they move through the school, pupils mature and develop emotionally as a result of being members of three separate close-knit communities which are united by common characteristics and values. They are lively, purposeful places, where the pupils learn to live up to the school's stated values of respect, responsibility, kindness, fairness, forgiveness and determination.
- 3.16 The vast majority of pupils who responded to the questionnaire acknowledged that the school encourages them to respect other people. All of the parents who responded agreed that the school actively promotes values of democracy, respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs. In this inclusive and caring school where there are pupils from many different ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds, the pupils co-exist entirely harmoniously and they relish the cultural diversity. Pupils express great interest in the talks given by parents about their own religion and customs, and the school leadership's recognition of different religions' festivals enhances pupils' enjoyment and understanding.
- 3.17 Pupils benefit from the many opportunities for leadership and service, and they take their responsibilities seriously. Formal roles include librarianship, house captaincy, membership of the school council and prefectship. The school successfully meets its aim to ensure that pupils contribute to the wider community through charitable engagement and a respect for the environment. Pupils choose their charitable projects by vote, after a lengthy process of research by the pupils themselves and presentations on behalf of charities. The school has recently supported charities for young carers, London's Air Ambulance and disadvantaged families in north London. These ventures awaken pupils to issues in the wider world and develop their understanding of and compassion for people much less fortunate than themselves. From a young age, pupils are made ecologically aware, and pupils' appreciation of their responsibility for environment is promoted through themes in the PSHEE programme. Pupils come to understand that decisions they make are important determinants of their own and others' well-being; a decision taken by the school council to review and alter the lunch menus led to a significant reduction in food waste.
- 3.18 Pupils successfully learn to co-operate and to work effectively as team members. In class, on the games field, in clubs and around the school generally, they demonstrate thoughtfulness and respect in the high quality of their collaboration. While they have their own personal aspirations, pupils generously celebrate the successes of their peers. The school is welcoming to newcomers. When a pupil with EAL enters the school, he or she is well supported by being paired where possible with a pupil who has the same mother tongue. From an early age, pupils recognise the importance of fair play and obeying rules, and they develop a strong moral sense of right and wrong; they come to understand and respect the system of laws, and this is reinforced by themes in assemblies and PSHEE, as well as by presentations from visitors. Pupils regard the school's application of rewards and sanctions as fair; they understand the graduation of sanctions and children in the EYFS learn about the public control of their emotions. A very small minority of parents and pupils who responded to the questionnaire felt that the school does not deal well with bullying. Evidence from the inspection indicated that, while pupils fall out over friendship 'issues' from time to time, actual bullying is extremely rare and the few instances are appropriately recorded. Pupils feel assured that staff would deal with any occurrences of bullying promptly, fairly and effectively. All the pupils interviewed spoke warmly of a happy and friendly community in which they show a genuine concern for one another.

- 3.19 The vast majority of the parents who responded to the questionnaire agreed that the school actively promotes good behaviour, and the evidence of the inspection wholly supported this view. Not only do pupils conduct themselves sensibly and courteously around the school, but their classroom behaviour is exemplary, affording them every opportunity for productive study. Pupils are personable and self-assured in the company of adults, and excellent ambassadors for their school.
- 3.20 The pupils' growth in confidence and self-worth is successfully nurtured by the school. Pupils gain confidence from the strong rapport, which they enjoy with their teachers, who set a considerate, good-humoured example to their charges. Mindfulness and yoga have been introduced into the school's programme, as have philosophy for children and the development of thinking skills, integral parts of the PSHEE syllabus from Year 1 to Year 8. It was widely noted during the inspection that pupils develop a mature capacity to use the vocabulary of reflection; they are able to articulate thoughtfully how they feel about themselves. Pupils in Year 3, for example, referred to the development of the mind and the inner self, and explained that they are able to think deeply about things in lessons and in assemblies. They particularly spoke of how music helps them to develop their thoughts and feelings. As they advance up the school, pupils become increasingly self-aware, acquiring a clear understanding of how to improve their own learning and performance, and appreciating the importance of personal values and codes of behaviour. Pupils' self-esteem is promoted by formal school systems, ranging from the EYFS 'star of the week' to the appointment of two senior pupils as head boy and head girl.
- 3.21 Encouraged and supported by teachers and coaches, pupils develop resilience and perseverance. Their determination, the school's sixth value, was observed in games lessons and in pupils' responses to academic challenges such as solving difficult problems in mathematics. Pupils gain spiritual enrichment from a wealth of sources such as the creative and performing arts, guest speakers, and visits at home and abroad.
- 3.22 All of those pupils who responded to the questionnaire stated that they understand how to keep safe online. In interview, pupils confirmed that they have been regularly educated in the dangers of social media. Pupils said that they feel safe at the school and that they know what to do if they need help or advice, or if one of their fellows is in difficulty or distress. Pupils acquire a clear understanding of safe practices, whether working in the science laboratory or encountering the hazards of snowy weather. The pupils understand the importance of healthy eating and they benefit from the opportunities to take exercise, in physical education lessons and games sessions as well as recreationally. Lunches were found to be sufficient in quantity and quality, with particular dietary needs catered for and salad and fresh fruit always on the menu. At every stage, pupils learn about healthy living, for instance through an assembly linked to National Heart Month and from the recent interactive presentation by a dentist.
- 3.23 The overwhelming majority of parents who responded to the questionnaire saw the school as being well governed led and managed, with the premises well maintained. The excellent outcomes throughout the school reflect the high priority placed by governance and leadership on the personal development of all pupils. Everyone associated with the school is very proud of it, and when they leave, the pupils are extremely well prepared for the responsibilities, opportunities and experiences of the next chapter in their lives.

4. INSPECTION EVIDENCE

- 4.1 The inspectors observed lessons, conducted formal interviews with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with members of staff and with the chairman of directors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period and attended assemblies. Inspectors visited the facilities for the youngest pupils, together with the learning support and educational resource areas. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined curriculum and other documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Mr Paul Spillane	Reporting inspector
Mrs Gillian Bilbo	Assistant reporting inspector
Mrs Patricia Preedy	Assistant reporting inspector
Mr Daniel Boswell	Compliance team inspector (director of finance and operations, IAPS school)
Mrs Angela Alsop	Team inspector (former deputy head, IAPS school)
Mrs Paula Hobbs	Team inspector (head teacher, ISA school)