



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

**Focused Compliance and Educational Quality Inspection Report
For Schools with Residential Provision**

Abbey College Manchester

March 2023

Contents

School's Details	3
1. Background Information	4
About the school	4
What the school seeks to do	4
About the pupils	4
2. Regulatory Compliance Inspection	5
Preface	5
Key findings	6
PART 1 – Quality of education provided	6
PART 2 – Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils	6
PART 3 – Welfare, health and safety of pupils	6
PART 4 – Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors	7
PART 5 – Premises of and accommodation at schools	7
PART 6 – Provision of information	7
PART 7 – Manner in which complaints are handled	7
PART 8 – Quality of leadership in and management of schools	7
3. Educational Quality Inspection	8
Preface	8
Key findings	8
Recommendations	8
The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements	8
The quality of the pupils' personal development	10
4. Inspection Evidence	13

School's Details

Abbey College	Abbey College Manchester			
DfE number	352/6044			
Address	Abbey College Manchester 5–7 Cheapside Manchester M2 4WG			
Telephone number	0161 817 2700			
Email address	admin@abbeymanchester.co.uk			
Principal	Mr Chris Randell			
Chair of governors	Sir John Ritblat			
Proprietor	Alpha Plus Group Ltd			
Age range	14 to 23			
Number of pupils on roll	209			
	Day pupils	123	Boarders	86
	Seniors	64	Sixth Form	145
Inspection dates	21 to 23 March 2023			

1. Background Information

About the school

- 1.1 Abbey College Manchester is a co-educational, independent college mostly providing one-year or two-year courses leading to GCSE, A level or further education qualifications. Established in 1990, the college is located in the city centre, occupying seven floors of a modern office block. It is owned and governed by the Alpha Plus Group Ltd. New boarding provision has been established since the previous inspection, and a new Principal was appointed in January 2022. The college arranges lodgings with local host families for pupils below the age of 16 on admission, whilst older pupils can choose to stay with a host family or in the pupil residence, situated within a 15-minute walk from the college.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.2 The college aims to guide pupils to achieve academic success and fulfil their aspirations. It seeks to provide a friendly, safe, supportive environment where pupils grow in confidence and learn to make informed decisions and make a positive contribution to the community.

About the pupils

- 1.3 Pupils come from the local area and a range of countries around the world. Nationally standardised test data provided by the school indicate that the ability of the pupils is below average. The school has identified 34 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), which include dyslexia, Asperger's syndrome, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and autism. Nineteen of these pupils receive additional specialist help outside the classroom. Two pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan. English is an additional language (EAL) for 154 pupils, whose needs are supported by their classroom teachers and dedicated lessons. Pupils identified as being the most able in the school's population are offered additional challenge through academic enrichment classes.

2. Regulatory Compliance Inspection

Preface

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is approved by the Secretary of State to inspect schools which are, or whose heads are, in membership of the associations which form the Independent Schools Council (ISC) and report on the extent to which they meet the Independent School Standards ('the standards') in the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, including the National Minimum Standards for Boarding ('boarding NMS'), where applicable. Additionally, inspections report 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. Inspections also comment on the progress made to meet any compliance action points set out in the school's most recent statutory inspection.

ISI inspections are 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 FOCUSED COMPLIANCE inspection reports only on the school's compliance with the standards, including the boarding NMS. 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 standards have been inspected in detail. These are the standards on safeguarding; measures to guard against bullying; arrangements for pupils' health and safety; arrangements to check the suitability of staff; the provision of information; 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 standards and requirements can be found here: [The Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014, National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools](#).

Key findings

- 2.1 The school meets the standards in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools 2022, 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's GCSE and A-level results in the years 2019 to 2022 confirm that teaching enables pupils to make good progress in the context of Part 1 paragraph 3(a).
- 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. Boarders have access to a suitable programme of activities.
- 2.4 Pupils receive relationships and sex education, except in so far as they are lawfully excused. The school has consulted parents and published a written statement of its policy which has regard to the relevant statutory guidance.
- 2.5 The standards relating to the quality of education [paragraphs 1–4] are met.**

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

- 2.6 Principles and values are actively promoted which facilitate the personal development of pupils as responsible, tolerant, law-abiding citizens. Boarders' views are actively encouraged, and their opinions and concerns are appropriately considered by staff. Boarders are supported to develop good relationships with fellow pupils and staff which are based on mutual trust and respect. Any prefect system operating in the school is suitably managed.
- 2.7 The standard relating to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development [paragraph 5] and NMS 13, 17 and 21 are met.**

PART 3 – Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 2.8 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.
- 2.9 An appropriate induction process for pupils new to boarding is implemented, and suitable provision is made for boarders' medical and health care, their food and drink and for managing boarders' laundry and possessions. Boarders have suitable contact with friends and family. Boarding staff are appropriately trained and deployed. The school makes appropriate arrangements to provide long-term lodgings for some boarders.
- 2.10 The standards relating to welfare, health and safety [paragraphs 6–16], the requirement of Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010, the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996, and NMS 3, 5–12, 15, 16 and 20 are met.**

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

- 2.11 The school makes appropriate checks to ensure the suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors, and a register is kept as required. Visitors to boarding accommodation are appropriately supervised and the school's arrangements for guardianship are suitably managed.
- 2.12 **The standards relating to the suitability of those in contact with pupils at the school [paragraphs 17–21] and NMS 19 and 22 are met.**

PART 5 – Premises of and accommodation at schools

- 2.13 Suitable toilet and changing facilities, and showering facilities where required by the standard, and appropriate accommodation for pupils' 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. Boarding accommodation is adequate for the needs of all boarders, and safeguards and promotes their welfare.
- 2.14 **The standards relating to the premises and accommodation [paragraphs 22–31] and NMS 4, 7 and 23 are met.**

PART 6 – Provision of information

- 2.15 A range of information is published, provided or made available to parents, inspectors and the Department for Education. This includes 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 any with education, health and care plans or English as an additional language. It also includes particulars of the school's academic performance during the preceding school year, 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. A suitable statement of boarding principles and practice is published by the school.
- 2.16 **The standard relating to the provision of information [paragraph 32] and NMS 1 are met.**

PART 7 – Manner in which complaints are handled

- 2.17 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, and identifying those relating to the boarding provision.
- 2.18 **The standard relating to the handling of complaints [paragraph 33] and NMS 14 are met.**

PART 8 – Quality of leadership in and management of schools

- 2.19 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 wellbeing of the pupils. Appropriate leadership and management of boarding ensure that the required policies and records are maintained and effectively monitored.
- 2.20 **The standard relating to leadership and management of the school [paragraph 34] and NMS 2 are 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.

The headline judgements apply one of the ISI descriptors 'excellent', 'good', 'sound' or 'unsatisfactory'.

Where necessary, National Curriculum nomenclature is used to refer to year groups in the school.

Key findings

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

- Pupils of all ages display excellent knowledge, skills and understanding across the curriculum and achieve highly in academic areas.
- Pupils have extremely positive attitudes to learning, responding to challenges with commitment and enthusiasm.
- Pupils' mathematical skills are well developed and they apply these successfully to other areas of learning.
- Pupils' study skills, their ability to hypothesise, analyse and synthesise are very well developed.

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

- Pupils' self-understanding and self-confidence are excellent; they are resilient and know how to improve their own learning.
- Pupils' respect for each other, for their own and other cultures is excellent.
- Pupils have a very well-developed moral understanding.

Recommendations

3.3 The school is advised to make the following improvements.

- Increase pupils' achievements in areas beyond the classroom by providing more opportunities to develop skills and interests in other areas.
- Strengthen pupils' team-building skills by providing more opportunities for them to work together to achieve common goals.

The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements

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

3.5 The school is highly successful in achieving its aims to guide pupils to achieve academic success and to fulfil their aspirations. Throughout the school, pupils make excellent academic progress. Pupils' success is supported by high-quality teaching and through the effective use of assessment data which allows their progress to be monitored and support tailored as necessary. Pupils with SEND and EAL make equally good progress, often outperforming expectations. Their achievements are the result of their own excellent attitudes and the effective support they receive. Excellent progress was seen in

most lessons, such as in an A-level chemistry lesson where pupils made excellent progress calculating equilibria constants accurately. Most parents and pupils who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire agreed that teaching enables pupils to learn and make progress. Boarders told inspectors that the provision of a quiet space to work enables them to concentrate and make progress while the common room provides somewhere to share ideas and discuss work with their peers. The 'early bird' quiet study period also allows access to teachers for help and guidance. Most parents and pupils say that boarding contributes positively to their progress.

- 3.6 Pupils develop excellent knowledge, skills and understanding across all areas of learning. In most teaching, well-chosen probing questions encourage pupils to think deeply about issues, and challenging activities ensure that pupils of all abilities develop their skills well. In a sixth-form art lesson pupils displayed a deep understanding of multi-media techniques and thorough knowledge of the artists studied. Pupils who spoke to the inspectors said that they feel that support and encouragement from their teachers helps them to become better learners. Pupils show a good understanding of their previous learning and are encouraged to apply this knowledge to new situations. For example, in a sixth-form business studies lesson, pupils built upon prior knowledge to successfully construct network diagrams when analysing strategic implementation. Governors and school leaders contribute to the success of the pupils by creating an ethos which supports and encourages pupils and staff in the pursuit of academic success.
- 3.7 Pupils' study skills are highly developed across the school. In a GCSE English lesson, pupils demonstrated excellent comparison skills when analysing a comprehension question which involved comparing two texts and identifying similarities and differences. In a sixth-form religious education (RE) lesson, pupils undertook highly perceptive independent research when preparing a project on the relationship between science and religion. Others showed well-developed study skills when investigating the key difference between correlation and causation in a biology lesson on lung cancer, including the importance of control groups in scientific research. They demonstrated excellent higher-level skills in discussion with their teacher and secure appreciation of unconscious bias, relationships, rigour and experimental design. The *Success in the Sixth form* lessons allow pupils to recall the key points of learning in all their subjects and to analyse anything they have not mastered from the lesson objectives. With the aid of teachers, pupils produce strategic and personal targets to improve their grades. Boarders say that working independently in their rooms has led them to develop high-level study skills, including the ability to research, write, analyse, and evaluate effectively in an academic manner including citation and referencing.
- 3.8 Pupils are very competent mathematicians and are comfortable using their mathematical skills across a wide range of other subjects. For example, in chemistry pupils accurately solved bond energy equations while in an A-level physics lesson, pupils successfully calculated the refraction index of VR glasses, using magnification and distance from a scaled drawing which they had carefully prepared. In an A-level accountancy class, pupils confidently and accurately calculated changes in equity. GCSE pupils showed a very good understanding of fractions and functions and could calculate area accurately. In a sixth-form further maths class pupils made rapid progress assimilating the methodology of two stage simplex problems and explained them accurately to their peers. Pupils successfully take part in the UK senior maths challenge.
- 3.9 Pupils' communication skills throughout the school are excellent. Pupils spoke confidently and articulately to inspectors, expressing their views with maturity and eloquence. They readily participate in class discussion, as seen in a sixth-form biology lessons where pupils were engaged in lively discussion about the key definitions in osmoregulation in the kidney. Pupils, including those with EAL, use technical language confidently and competently, such as in a sixth-form economics lesson where they showed a very good understanding and knowledge of terms such as financial crowding out and the multiplier effect. In a sixth-form French lesson, pupils spoke fluently and animatedly using excellent tone, inflection and accent during a discussion in the target language about voter apathy among the young in France. Writing skills are well developed, as seen in GCSE work where pupils wrote

extended essays using paragraphs and figures of speech accurately. Non-fiction writing showed a good command of precise terminology, for example in an answer on the periodic table in chemistry. Pupils with EAL make very good progress across the range of qualifications which the school offers. Their progress in English is excellent and they develop strong listening, reading and speaking skills. They are supported in their learning by specialist teachers and intensive courses delivered in small groups. Boarders say that living with different nationalities results in English being the main method of communication and this helps with their fluency and understanding.

- 3.10 Pupils competently use a broad range of information and communication technology (ICT) skills, as well as specific computing skills such as coding. Pupils are adept at creating presentations which include text, photographs and maps, as seen in GCSE projects on global warming and greenhouse gases. In a sixth-form physics lesson on radioactivity, pupils used their laptops to analyse data, and plot a smooth curve to successfully calculate the half-life. They do this with care, accuracy and precision, additionally spotting the deliberate mistake in scaling in the columns of the tables provided. In a GCSE photography class pupils used a software programme to manipulate their photographs and create images in the style of the artists they had been studying. In an enrichment activity, pupils worked together to make a computer game to measure reaction times, showing an excellent command of coding and electronics.
- 3.11 Pupils are successful in a range of creative and physical pursuits and are supported in their achievements by a suitably diverse extra-curricular programme. The most talented pupils represent regional and national teams in a range of sports, notably football. Pupils have also been successful in national art competitions. However, opportunities in subjects beyond the academic curriculum, such as drama and music are limited and thus restrict pupils' development in these and other areas.
- 3.12 Pupils demonstrate excellent attitudes to learning through their enthusiastic and co-operative approach to lessons. They are highly motivated and work together very successfully. Pupils are supported in their learning by the excellent relationships with their teachers which creates an atmosphere conducive to learning. They reflect on their learning and adapt their approach to tasks in a learning environment in which risk-taking is encouraged and mistakes are seen as learning opportunities. Throughout the school, pupils challenge each other's ideas in a constructive way whilst being supportive and respectful of each other's views. Pupils have a determination to understand as witnessed in the lower ability English language group where pupils were faced with challenging vocabulary and complex meanings on the subject of crime. They were entirely focused, quickly checking new vocabulary and immediately attempting to use it in discussion. Pupils' work is well organised and neatly presented, demonstrating attention to detail and pupils' evident pride in their work.

The quality of the pupils' personal development

- 3.13 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 3.14 The pupils' self-understanding, self-confidence and resilience is excellent. They show excellent self-knowledge and are aware at all times of their current levels and how they can improve. This is promoted by the school's PATCHH system (*Progress, Areas for Development, Target grade, Current Grade, How to get to the next level, Homework*), which enables pupils to understand their current academic level and what they need to do to improve. Pupils appreciate the detailed written and oral feedback they receive from their teachers. Self- and peer-assessment is used regularly throughout the school and pupils say this helps them understand how to improve. Pupils develop resilience and perseverance. In discussion with inspectors, pupils compared their current achievements with the level of work they could manage previously, taking pride in the new skills they have learned, particularly their progress in English. Pupils are given considerable freedom, and this is key in developing their self-confidence and independence and in ensuring they are self-aware. They quickly

learn to take responsibility for themselves, getting to school on time and completing work before deadlines.

- 3.15 Pupils' moral understanding is excellent. Their personal development is characterised by excellent standards of behaviour and respect. The school does not have written rules, but all pupils understand the concept of right and wrong, they are very mindful of the wellbeing of others and are considerate and caring in their relationships with peers and adults. They are respectful of the laws and conventions in wider society. Pupils have an air of openness and frank discussion with each other and through this they have a common approach to cooperation and harmonious living. Pupils discuss moral and ethical issues with sensitivity, as seen in a sixth-form biology lessons when they debated the arguments for and against using animals in medical research. Almost all parents and most pupils agreed that the school actively promotes and expects good behaviour.
- 3.16 Pupils respect and value diversity within society. They successfully develop a deep understanding of, and respect for, the beliefs and values of those from different backgrounds to themselves. They are aided in this by the multicultural nature of the pupil body, with over 30 different nationalities being represented within the school. Pupils empathise with those who are different and are assisted in developing their understanding of others through the well-planned relationship education programme. The school widens pupils' experience of diversity through personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) lessons which teach about different faiths and cultures. Pupils demonstrated an excellent understanding of the concept of *respect* during a PSHE lesson which was taught simultaneously to the whole pupil body. They showed great maturity when discussing the moral issues affecting respect for others and themselves. Most parents and pupils felt that the school encourages an atmosphere of respect and tolerance. Pupils' respect for others is fostered by the strong school culture embodied by school leaders and governors.
- 3.17 Over time, pupils become increasingly aware of the consequences of their decisions and reflect sensibly on matters such as preparing for exams. Pupils think carefully about which enrichment activities to join, whether to be members of the school council and which position of responsibility to apply for. They choose their courses of study, both at the school and in university applications, with care and mature consideration of their own abilities and interests. Many lessons involve an element of decision-making, and pupils make thoughtful and careful choices. For example, in a sixth-form photography lesson, pupils continually made creative decisions, including how to use colour, shape and texture, assessing the impact of their choices throughout. Pupils are supported and guided by staff throughout their time at school so that they become highly capable decision-makers. Boarders say that the increased responsibility of organising themselves have contributed to improving their decision-making skills.
- 3.18 Pupils exhibit a strong spiritual awareness. In discussion pupils explained that spirituality was something bigger than the individual person. They have a mature appreciation of the non-material aspects of life, commenting with feeling upon the excellent artwork on display. Pupils talked about their appreciation of the recent cultural day, during which they celebrated their own cultures by wearing national costumes, producing regional food, and performing music and dance from their own countries. Boarders report that mixing with a diverse range of cultures and religions gives them insight into their own spirituality.
- 3.19 Pupils show excellent social awareness and build constructive relationships with each other in all aspects of school life. They collaborate well with their peers and with pupils across year groups. This is promoted by the school ethos, which encourages relaxed relationships and social confidence. A few parents felt that the school does not equip their child with the teamworking and social skills they need in later life. Whilst most lessons involved pair working and discussion, opportunities for pupils to work in larger groups to achieve common goals are limited and thus teambuilding skills are not so well developed.

- 3.20 Pupils enjoy making a positive and meaningful contribution to the school community through roles such as being a member of the school council. This puts forward ideas for improvements in the school community, such as the creation of a common room. Pupils show a mature understanding of how they can help those less fortunate than themselves. They suggest which charities to support and decide upon fund-raising activities for a range of local, national and international charities. Some boarders are involved in their local places of worship and make charitable contributions as part of their faith.
- 3.21 Pupils have a very good understanding of how to keep themselves healthy and stay safe. Most parents and pupils agreed that the school encourages pupils to learn about and adopt a healthy lifestyle. Boarders are provided with freshly prepared meals in the evening and fruit is readily available. Pupils acquire effective skills to manage stress and maintain positive mental health. Pupils say that they appreciate the variety of relaxation opportunities available on Wednesday afternoons such as yoga. Pupils greatly value the wellbeing room which provides space for pupils to relax and opportunities to talk with trained staff, including a counsellor. Boarders have access to an independent listener who lives locally and is readily available. Almost all parents felt that the school was a safe environment and almost all pupils agreed that the school teaches them how to stay safe when online. Pupils appreciate the importance of physical fitness, with the Wednesday afternoon multisports activity being greatly enjoyed.

4. Inspection Evidence

- 4.1 The inspectors observed lessons, had discussions with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with members of staff and with a group of governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended form meetings. Inspectors visited boarding houses and the learning support and educational resource areas. Inspectors considered the responses of parents, staff and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires. The inspectors examined curriculum and other documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Mr William Ibbetson-Price	Reporting inspector
Mr Richard Metcalfe	Compliance team inspector (Former bursar, HMC school)
Mrs Pamela Hutley	Team inspector (Former head, ISA school)
Dr Antony Johns	Team inspector for boarding (Former senior manager, HMC school)