

School inspection report

14 to 16 January

Abingdon House School

Broadley Terrace

London

NW1 6LG

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 monitor the work of the school effectively. They conduct regular audits to ensure that leaders have the appropriate skills and knowledge to fulfil their responsibilities effectively and consistently so that the requirements of the relevant Standards are consistently met. The school is governed and managed effectively, creating a positive and collaborative environment for staff, parents and pupils.
2. Leaders have developed a curriculum designed effectively to meet the needs of pupils in all age phases. They ensure that curriculum plans, schemes of work and teaching and assessment consider each pupil's special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and education health and care (EHC) plans.
3. Teachers plan lessons from a well-devised curriculum overview. Staff demonstrate good subject knowledge and understanding and a deep understanding of pupils' needs, aptitudes and prior attainment gained from thoroughly assessing pupils' work, attitudes, and their learning. Leaders' deep understanding of pupils' mental health needs, and the school's therapeutic approach to education, ensure pupils progress from their starting points.
4. Leaders provide appropriate information to parents and update their policies so that they always reflect current statutory guidance. However, leaders do not always ensure that revised policies are published promptly on the school's website.
5. Leaders prioritise pupils' mental health through providing them with strategies for self-regulation and emotional control, sensory tools, and individual plans. A significant strength is that leaders ensure that therapists work together in highly effective partnership with staff and that all staff working with pupils effectively use consistent therapeutic approaches to support pupils' learning extremely successfully. In addition, leaders provide parent workshops to encourage the use of similar effective strategies at home. All staff are well trained in specific therapeutic approaches to thoroughly support individual pupils' specific needs.
6. Staff provide and communicate a consistent set of behavioural expectations that help create a stable environment for pupils and provide them with clear understanding about school rules and routines. The displays of school rules, corridor rules and classroom rules exemplify this and reinforce the communication directly from staff.
7. The school takes effective steps to ensure suitable health and safety practice and reduce potential risk by, for example, restricting access to potentially hazardous locations such as electrical cupboards and back staircases. This reflects the school's careful management of the physical environment. However, some first aid procedures are not consistently implemented in line with the first aid policy.
8. Staff actively promote diversity, tolerance and harmony through assemblies, celebrations of cultural and religious events and family engagement. The school prepares pupils well for life in modern Britain. It provides pupils with helpful and accessible information, advice and guidance to help them make decisions about their next steps in education and future life.

9. Staff discuss national and global events with pupils during form time to help prepare them for the experiences of British life and the world around them. Programmes on financial literacy, social skills, and resilience equip pupils to navigate real-world challenges confidently.
10. Leaders maintain effective systems for managing safeguarding concerns and staff's confidence in safeguarding procedures reflects thorough training and oversight. Staff understand their safeguarding responsibilities well.
11. There is mutual trust between staff and pupils. Highly productive relationships with families ensure that pupils' attendance and physical and emotional wellbeing are supported well.

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:

- ensure the prompt publication of the school's up-to-date policies on the school's website
- ensure that staff consistently implement the first aid procedures identified in the first aid policy.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

12. Leaders at all levels demonstrate good skills and knowledge required to support pupils with social, emotional or mental health needs effectively. They make decisions to support the pupils' wellbeing that are mindful of the school's aims to provide specialist education with high expectations and aspirations in a nurturing environment through a practical integrated therapy approach that works well in practice. Leaders communicate the school's aims and ethos effectively to parents, staff and pupils.
13. The school promotes a culture where staff and pupils can reflect on their work. Emphasis is placed on understanding pupils' mental health needs and the impact of these on their learning and wellbeing. Leaders effectively foster an inclusive, nurturing environment where pupils can develop academically, socially and emotionally.
14. Leaders across the school prioritise individualised learning by tailoring the curriculum to meet the diverse needs of pupils. By focusing on achievable goals and recognising each pupil's strengths, leaders ensure that pupils experience meaningful progress and engagement. Leaders of provision for pupils who have SEND and therapists in both schools work effectively with partner agencies to support pupils' wellbeing and progress by providing appropriate and timely support when required.
15. The leadership's decision to establish a comprehensive therapeutic framework that integrates teachers, occupational therapists, speech and language therapists and physiotherapists into the school's daily operations is highly beneficial to pupils' motivation, engagement, and achievement. Staff are trained in specific therapeutic approaches that meet the social, mental and learning needs of individual pupils very well. Parents are provided with support and guidance by both therapists and teaching staff on a frequent basis to ensure that consistent routines and therapy are embedded both at school and at home.
16. Leaders rigorously check the effectiveness of teaching and provide staff with high quality feedback to support continued improvement. Professional development opportunities are robustly linked to the needs of individual staff members and the needs of the school and pupils. Leaders carefully monitor pupils' progress and attainment to ensure they achieve as well as they can. Leaders also review pupils' mental health very carefully, and this helps staff to utilise the most effective strategies to support pupils' learning.
17. Comprehensive systems of monitoring and self-evaluation are used to track pupils' progress and behaviour and the impact of SEND provision. A cohesive system of record keeping links pupils' support, assessments, and review meeting notes and facilitates meaningful and effective reflection and evaluation. This helps staff to make adjustments to their provision when necessary.
18. Risk assessments are thorough and include checks to evaluate potential risks in the classroom or during visits. Leaders address key areas of potential risk to pupils such as online activity and outdoor independence effectively through proactive measures, including training pupils about safe travel, and provide support guidance for their social interaction outside of school.
19. Leaders produce risk assessments relating to individual pupils when needed to protect pupils, such as when there are concerns about potential self-harm. These risk assessments include thorough consideration of methods to mitigate potential risks to individual pupils and those around them.

Consultation with external professionals and the family is part of this process. Risk assessment also forms part of leaders' annual review of education, health and care (EHC) plans, as required.

20. The school meets the requirements of the Equality Act (2010), including those to protect pupils from discrimination or prejudice. The accessibility plan appropriately outlines the modifications necessary for pupils' needs and is reviewed regularly by leaders.
21. Leaders consistently follow the school's appropriate procedures when responding to parental complaints. Most concerns are resolved informally, and formal complaints are managed within the stated time scales. Leaders keep suitable records of their actions and findings.
22. Leaders typically provide all required information on the school website for parents and prospective parents. They also provide parents with regular reports about their child's progress. However, while the attendance policy and practice were updated in line with up-to-date statutory guidance, it was not promptly made available on the school website. Leaders rectified this during the inspection. Leaders provide the relevant local authorities with the required information relating to the use of funds for pupils who have an EHC plan.
23. Governors have a clear vision of the school's future direction. They understand the importance of educational provision to pupils' mental health and work effectively with school leaders to establish effective partnerships between therapy and education staff. Governors provide a well-balanced combination of encouraging support and challenge to leaders to help the school improve by ensuring they have the appropriate skills and knowledge to fulfil their responsibilities so that the school meets the Standards. Governors also oversee the arrangements for managing staff performance well.

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

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

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

25. When pupils enter the school, many have had a fractured experience of education. Gaps in learning due to poor health, attendance and exclusion from previous schools are common. In some cases, pupils have become so disaffected with education that even minimal engagement in education is a big step forward. The broad and balanced curriculum is designed effectively to enable pupils, including those with such a background, to develop knowledge and skills across all areas. The focus is on developing pupils' social and emotional skills alongside academic progress to help pupils develop independence and become equipped to lead meaningful and fulfilling lives.
26. Prep school programmes are adapted and appropriate to the pupils' core learning of English, mathematics and science alongside technological, human and social needs, including fine motor skills and a creative subject carousel. The curriculums include appropriate plans and schemes of work that sequentially build blocks of subject learning in ways that match the pupils' cognitive abilities and needs.
27. All staff are trained in occupational therapy techniques, life skills development, and social, emotional, and mental health support strategies. Staff consider the individual pupils' needs to determine what support to provide. The joint planning and in-class support leads to pupils' rapid progress from individual starting points academically, therapeutically, and with regard to mental health and emotional wellbeing. Older pupils achieve various qualifications, from unit awards and entry-level qualifications to Level 2 qualifications. These include GCSE English and mathematics and vocational qualifications in subjects such as sport and hospitality and tourism.
28. The school's chosen teaching methods, based on an integrated therapy model, are consistently effective across both prep and senior schools. Teachers, therapists, and support staff work together effectively to ensure that learning activities meet each pupil's needs. Staff use their information on pupils' behaviour, emotional wellbeing, and learning to plan pupils' learning effectively. Staff employ, when appropriate, visual aids, sensory tools, support aids such as voice typing and practical activities to enhance pupils' learning experiences and support their individual needs.
29. Staff implement effective teaching strategies, including with regard to how pupils are grouped, to ensure pupils learn and progress. Facilitating bespoke, individualised curriculum pathways for older pupils ensures equal opportunity with teaching that does not discriminate. Staff effectively implement curriculum plans and schemes of work, ensuring lessons are purposeful and aligned with educational and pastoral goals. Lessons are adapted as they progress to ensure all pupils remain engaged and continue to learn efficiently.
30. Staff make effective use of resources such as laptops, overlays, and fidget tools as appropriate to meet individual pupils' needs. They utilise their good subject knowledge to employ effective questioning techniques and adapt activities appropriately to challenge and support pupils. Teaching does not undermine values such as that of mutual respect or discriminate against pupils in any way.
31. Pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) receive support through the use of visual aids and computer aided applications to practise the use of words. These include objects or images that are used for specific activities or routines. Consequently, these pupils make good progress from their starting points through well targeted speech and language support.

32. Assessment and feedback are integral to lessons, with staff providing clear and constructive guidance to help pupils build on prior knowledge and develop new skills. Regular check-ins and ongoing formative assessments ensure pupils understand their progress and next steps, fostering confidence and resilience. Pupils appreciate the helpful feedback from staff, including the recently introduced 'one to five' credit system and reward books that enable class teachers to provide immediate praise and feedback about their achievement during or after completion of an activity.
33. Prep school pupils experience recreation activities, including clubs and enrichment, that support physical health and help develop daily living skills and independence. Older pupils can choose one-on-one coaching sessions such as kickboxing or engage in games organised by a local Premier League football team to develop their skills in this area. They can also hone their skills in playing board games, playing in the school band, or take part in enrichment activities such as 'Around the World' to learn basic foreign language skills, including french.

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

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

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

35. Many aspects of the school's curriculum help build pupils' resilience, confidence, and self-esteem. Staff understand the pupils' needs well and intersperse lessons with, for example, a movement break, a calming activity, or a 'happy zone' as needed to support individuals' emotional wellbeing. This helps them to tackle learning activities that develop their confidence and self-esteem. The way each classroom is set up supports pupils' physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing. The rooms are ordered and well labelled, with visual timetables that pupils and teachers use to positive effect which consolidates pupils' resilience for learning. Each room has suitable regard for health and safety, with well-signposted fire evacuation notices.
36. Staff teach pupils about a range of religions and faiths in ways suited to their learning needs, such as through the use of sensory regulation toolboxes. These are available in every room so pupils can use them when needed for reflective thinking, mediation and discussions.
37. Teachers, therapists, and assistants are very responsive to the pupils' mental needs and regularly adjust what is planned to support the pupils' current needs best. Pupils are encouraged to access their own equipment and tools whenever possible to support their confidence in their ability to act independently.
38. The personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) programme meets the requirements of current statutory guidance. It includes suitable content and takes into account a national specialist organisation's guidance about PSHE for pupils who have SEND. The programme is taught in ways designed to take into account the individual pupils' specific needs and developmental abilities. For example, repetition of content is planned and used when this would support and secure pupils' knowledge and understanding productively. Pupils' understanding, knowledge of, and engagement with relationships and sex education (RSE) topics, such as the importance of consent, are assessed effectively and regularly.
39. Staff maintain the premises and accommodation effectively. These include suitable medical and toilet and washing facilities. Pupils receive first aid support from staff appropriately trained in first aid, who are on hand to deliver timely, competent and appropriate treatment when it is sought. However, staff do not always follow the first aid procedures identified in the school's policy, particularly those related to minor injuries.
40. The effective behaviour management strategies reflect the school's supportive ethos. Pupils are provided with various provisions, such as sensory rooms, one-to-one support and calming activities to manage their inability to control or regulate emotional responses, which can lead to mood swings and impulsivity. Leaders reinforce their expectations of desired behaviour, through merits and commendations, the celebration of positive behaviour and the constant promotion of kindness. Pupils are motivated by this system. The atmosphere in lessons is purposeful and calm. Even when pupils experience dysregulation, staff use effective strategies to support them, and the pupils themselves successfully re-engage with their academic work.
41. The school's anti-bullying strategy is effective. Pupils develop a clear understanding of the distinction between bullying and unkindness. Leaders respond effectively to the rare bullying incidents that take place through appropriate support for all parties involved.

42. Supervision is effective. Leaders deploy staff to reflect the pupils' needs and the nature of different areas of the provision. Staff apply their understanding of pupils' needs and behaviour to support their relationship building skills while supervising them.
43. Leaders closely track attendance, engaging parents and external agencies as needed. Personalised timetables and supportive measures help reintegrate pupils who have had low attendance, and collaboration with external agencies addresses high-need cases. The school maintains admission and attendance registers in line with current statutory guidance. Leaders inform the local authority whenever pupils join or leave the school at non-standard times of transition.
44. Pupils benefit from regular physical education (PE), including daily visits to local sports facilities, which encourage teamwork, resilience and physical fitness. Healthy eating is a focus of the PE programme, with pupils' learning about the importance of a balanced diet supported by a well-stocked salad bar and daily fruit options.

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

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

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

46. Appropriate plans and schemes of work engender pupils' respect and empathy for others. Pupils learn to be tolerant of and respectful to others and their protected characteristics, such as disability, belief, race, sex and sexual orientation. For example, staff manage discussions about themes such as neurodiversity and gender identity with care to ensure inclusivity as well as develop pupils' knowledge and understanding. Pupils learn about the notion of human rights, issues relating to equality and about the harm that prejudice and discrimination can cause.
47. The prep school celebrates equality and diversity events such as those focused on neurodiversity and World Religion Day. The senior school celebrates similar events, including those which support the rights of the lesbian, gay and bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people in society. Visitors attend assemblies to provide information about important cultural and religious occasions such as Hanukkah.
48. In prep school, pupils benefit from lessons about the commercial world and possible careers such as learning about the different jobs created by technology. These include discussions on the economy, e-commerce, and how online purchasing has positively affected technology. In senior school, pupils learn cookery and life skills as part of their art and design technology, and in science, they learn about horticulture and their local environment.
49. The school develops pupils' economic awareness effectively, including through pathways that focus on developing vocational skills and those that contribute to employability. Bespoke social and 'life skills' sessions include developing pupils' economic skills and understanding, such as the ability to read and understand a payslip. Budgeting activities involve managing the school tuck shop, where pupils must work as a team. 'Young Enterprise' activities involve external market stalls to raise money for charity, where pupils learn about calculating costs, staffing, profit and loss. These activities help pupils develop the social skills needed to live independently.
50. The school provides effective and impartial careers advice that reflects nationally available benchmarks. It takes into account pupils' particular needs and aspirations. Staff work with pupils to help them find relevant courses, including routes into further and higher education. The staff also support pupils, where appropriate, in writing curriculum vitae, applying for apprenticeships and looking at college choices. Pupils achieve qualifications that set them up for future success. The targeted support that pupils receive helps them towards future destinations, whether in employment, education or training, that prove successful for them.
51. Leaders enable pupils to develop their sense of social responsibility effectively. Pupils engage in charitable work and fund raising with local organisations to support their community. For example, they work with a local women's refuge and projects such as 'Magic Breakfast' and the Imperial College's urban wildlife programmes.
52. Pupils experience, explore and contribute to activities that help develop their understanding of right and wrong, respect for law, social institutions and services. They learn about democratic systems and principles and how Parliament operates. Class elections of form representatives and other votes they make help them explore political processes in a fair way without bias. Visits to locations such as the Tower of London add to pupils' knowledge and understanding of historical events and

characters. Staff engage pupils in discussions that further their knowledge about how laws are made and enforced.

53. On their first arrival at the school, pupils are often not yet in the right frame of mind to engage with their education as productively as possible. The school caters for those pupils whose previous negative educational experiences or needs make it difficult for them to see a route through education. Leaders and staff provide these and other pupils with sensitive help, information and support that enables them to develop confidence about the future and work towards something to look forward to when they leave the school.

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

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

Safeguarding

55. Leaders maintain an effective safeguarding culture across the school. Staff are actively encouraged to report any concerns, no matter how minor. Leaders promote a culture of understanding that 'it can happen here'.
56. Governors maintain comprehensive oversight of the school's safeguarding arrangements to ensure that they are robust and reflect current statutory guidance. They regularly check safeguarding policies, training, and procedures and liaise with leaders with designated safeguarding responsibilities.
57. Members of the safeguarding team maintain a comprehensive presence across both school sites and are appropriately trained for their role. The safeguarding team meets weekly to discuss the support for pupils affected by safeguarding issues. Leaders respond effectively to any safeguarding concerns that arise, including by liaising with relevant external agencies and, where necessary, referring concerns to them. Leaders transfer safeguarding files to receiving schools when this applies. They also liaise effectively with the local authority with regard to any concerns about children missing education.
58. Staff receive appropriate safeguarding training regularly and when they first join the school. As a result, staff understand and implement their responsibilities under the staff code of conduct. They are vigilant to any signs that pupils might present that could indicate a possible safeguarding issue. Staff understand the procedures to report safeguarding concerns and how to follow the whistleblowing policy should allegations against or concerns about adults working with the pupils arise.
59. Leaders carry out robust pre-employment checks to ensure that staff and governors are suitable to work with children. These checks are undertaken before staff or governors commence working at the school and are recorded accurately in a suitable single central record of appointments.
60. Staff teach pupils sensitively and with regard for their previous experiences about how to keep themselves safe, including when using the internet. Pupils are taught to identify potential risks, including those relating to online gaming and use of social media. Effective filtering and monitoring procedures are in place and tested regularly.
61. Pupils feel confident to speak to a staff member should they have concerns about themselves or others. The supportive professional relationships that leaders and staff develop with pupils help them to have confidence that they are listened to and understood.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

School details

School	Abingdon House School
Department for Education number	213/6405
Address	Abingdon House School Broadley Terrace London NW1 6LG
Phone number	02037505526
Email address	office@abingdonhouseschool.co.uk
Website	http://www.abingdonhouseschool.co.uk
Proprietor	Cavendish Education
Chair	Mr Aatif Hassan
Headteacher	Mr Rory Vokes-Dudgeon
Age range	5 to 19
Number of pupils	147
Date of previous inspection	13 January 2022

Information about the school

63. Abingdon House School is an independent co-educational day school. It is part of the Cavendish Education Group, whose directors oversee the school. The school specialises in the education of pupils who have SEND. The school is situated on two sites known as South Kensington Prep School and Marylebone Senior School.
64. The school has identified all pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The school has 127 pupils with an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
65. The school has identified English as an additional language for 18 pupils.
66. The school states its aims are to provide a mainstream style, specialist education with high expectations and aspirations in a nurturing environment facilitated by a multidisciplinary team through an integrated therapy approach. It seeks to remove barriers to learning and focus on supporting pupils in developing their personal and academic skills, wellbeing, confidence, and self-esteem to achieve independence and lead meaningful and fulfilling lives.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

14 to 16 January 2025

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

68. 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 principal education director and other governors
- discussions with the headteacher, school leaders, managers and other members of staff
- discussions with pupils
- visits to the learning support area and facilities for physical education
- scrutiny of samples of pupils' work
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

69. 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**.

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