

School inspection report

3 to 5 March 2026

Abbey College Manchester

5 – 7 Cheapside

Off King Street

Manchester

M2 4WG

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. Leaders provide clear direction for the school and promote a welcoming environment for a diverse international community of pupils. The school's ethos places equal importance on academic ambition and personal development, which helps pupils from a wide range of backgrounds feel secure and supported.
2. Governors provide structured oversight through regular engagement with leaders, staff and pupils, which enables them to remain informed about the school's work and priorities. However, these monitoring arrangements do not ensure that all regulatory requirements are met consistently. In particular, the school does not provide pupils of compulsory school age with physical education (PE) within the curriculum, and the school site does not provide pupils with suitable outdoor space.
3. Teaching supports pupils to engage successfully with demanding academic programmes that prepare them for further study. Teachers provide pupils with individual guidance and respond effectively to their learning needs so that pupils make good progress.
4. Pupils participate positively in lessons and demonstrate secure understanding of subject content across a range of academic disciplines. Leaders ensure that pupils experience a varied programme of enrichment activities that complement the formal curriculum and encourage pupils to develop wider interests and collaborative skills.
5. A suitable assessment framework is in place. However, leaders do not make consistently effective use of assessment data to evaluate pupils' progress and inform planning across the school.
6. Pupils' physical and emotional wellbeing is supported through the development of positive relationships with staff and a culture that encourages mutual respect. Pupils feel safe within the school community and are supported by staff in both the academic and boarding environments. The programme for personal development helps pupils develop responsible decision-making and an awareness of how to support their own personal safety and emotional wellbeing.
7. Behaviour is calm and respectful. However, leaders' monitoring of pupils' behaviour and sanctions does not always identify patterns in pupils' behaviour so that appropriate support can be provided.
8. Boarding provision contributes positively to pupils' experience of school life. Boarders benefit from supportive relationships with staff and structured routines that promote emotional wellbeing and independence. Leaders ensure that evening study periods provide opportunities for pupils to consolidate their learning with support from staff, and social activities enable boarders to relax and develop friendships. Living in a residential community helps pupils learn to co-operate with others, manage shared responsibilities and develop confidence in their independence.
9. The school's curriculum enables pupils to learn about different cultures and perspectives. Through lessons and wider activities pupils explore social issues, democracy and the responsibilities associated with living in modern British society.
10. Pupils contribute to school life through leadership roles and collaborative activities, developing confidence in expressing their views and understanding the value of working together for the benefit of the community.

11. Safeguarding is given a high priority across the school and the boarding provision. Staff understand safeguarding expectations and take appropriate action when concerns arise. Leaders maintain clear procedures for responding to and recording safeguarding concerns and work with external agencies effectively.
12. Pupils know which adults they can approach if they need help and feel confident that their concerns will be taken seriously. The school typically carries out and records all required safer recruitment checks appropriately. However, at the start of the inspection the single central record of appointments (SCR) contained a minor administrative error in the recording of checks for a contractor. Leaders rectified this during the inspection.

The extent to which the school meets the Standards

- Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance are not 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 not met.
- Standards relating to pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society are met.
- Standards relating to safeguarding are met.

Areas for action

The proprietor must ensure that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school:

- demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role so that the independent school Standards are consistently met
- fulfil their responsibilities effectively, so that the independent school Standards are consistently met and
- actively promote the wellbeing of the pupils

so that:

- the curriculum includes physical education for pupils of compulsory school age
- the school provides pupils with suitable outdoor space.

Recommended next steps

Leaders should:

- make consistently effective use of assessment data to evaluate pupils' progress and inform planning across the school
- strengthen the monitoring of pupils' behaviour so that any patterns can be identified and appropriate support provided
- ensure that all required safer recruitment checks are recorded accurately on the single central record of appointments.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

13. Governors provide oversight of the school through regular visits during the year. During these visits they review aspects of provision, meet with leaders, staff and pupils and scrutinise documentation including the whole-school development plan. Through this process, governors monitor areas such as safeguarding and the promotion of pupils' wellbeing and gain insight into how leaders implement the school's aims. However, governors do not ensure that leaders always demonstrate appropriate skills and knowledge or fulfil their responsibilities effectively. As a result, not all the Standards are met.
14. Leaders promote the school's aims of providing a supportive and academically focused environment for a diverse international pupil body. They understand the needs of pupils who join the school from a wide range of educational and cultural backgrounds and adapt provision accordingly. Staff provide structured induction arrangements and personalised academic pathways. Pupils are well supported and settle quickly, developing confidence within the school community. As a result, pupils learn in an orderly environment where expectations for behaviour and respect are understood.
15. Leaders ensure that policies and procedures are in place and reviewed regularly. Policies are made available to parents through the school's website and staff develop their understanding of these policies through training and professional development. Leaders ensure that appropriate information is published and accessible to parents and others. The school notifies the local authority whenever pupils join or leave the school at non-standard times of transition.
16. Leaders ensure that the school fulfils its responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010. They implement a suitable accessibility plan so that pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) can access provision. The school provides the local authority with the required information about the use of funding for pupils who have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan).
17. Leaders implement a clear complaints procedure that enables concerns to be addressed promptly and records to be reviewed so that any patterns can be identified.
18. Leaders establish links with external organisations in order to support pupils' wellbeing and development. These include partnerships with educational providers, community organisations, safeguarding partners and specialist services where appropriate. Through these links, pupils access additional guidance and support.
19. Leaders maintain oversight of risk management through a risk register which is reviewed by senior leaders and governors. Risk assessments identify potential risks and the appropriate actions are taken to mitigate these.
20. Leaders monitor teaching and learning through lesson observations, learning walks, work scrutiny and discussions with middle leaders. They evaluate provision through regular meetings so that priorities for improvement are identified and addressed.

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

21. Standards are not met consistently with regard to the provision of physical education as part of the curriculum and provision of outdoor space.
22. Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance are not met.
- 23. Not all the relevant Standards are met. A schedule of unmet Standards is included in the report.**

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

24. Leaders implement a curriculum that prepares pupils effectively for further study and university entrance. Pupils follow structured academic pathways leading to GCSEs, A levels and international foundation programmes. The curriculum spans a range of subject areas including languages, mathematics, science, technology and creative disciplines and supports pupils in developing effective communication and numerical skills.
25. Leaders review curriculum provision regularly so that it reflects the needs of the diverse pupil cohort. Many pupils join from a range of international education systems and therefore arrive with differing prior knowledge and subject experience. Leaders consider this when planning and sequencing the curriculum. As a result, pupils access appropriate academic pathways that are designed methodically to enable them to develop the knowledge and skills required for progression to higher education.
26. Teaching supports pupils in building their knowledge and developing a secure understanding across subjects. Teachers demonstrate secure subject knowledge and plan lessons that provide clear explanations, modelling and opportunities for pupils to practise and apply their developing skills. A range of teaching approaches is used, including when appropriate, direct instruction, questioning, independent work and individual guidance.
27. In many lessons, effective planning and the use of well-chosen resources support engagement and understanding. For example, in biology, pupils apply advanced knowledge of muscle contraction through well-structured teaching that links prior learning to examination requirements. In mathematics, clear modelling and structured practice enable pupils to apply mathematical methods confidently when solving increasingly complex problems. Behaviour in lessons is positive and relationships between teachers and pupils support purposeful learning. Teachers provide well-pitched guidance to individual pupils that supports their confidence and engagement and promotes their learning effectively.
28. Teachers enable pupils to demonstrate secure understanding by applying their knowledge effectively in their learning. Pupils draw on prior knowledge to tackle new tasks and respond constructively to feedback to improve their work. For example, pupils studying literature interpret complex texts using scanning and vocabulary strategies, while pupils studying textiles integrate the consideration of sustainability into design work. In many lessons, pupils respond thoughtfully to questioning and demonstrate secure understanding of subject content. Teachers combine clear explanations with opportunities for pupils to apply their understanding, including when appropriate, through discussion and independent work. As a result, pupils make good progress.
29. Leaders ensure that pupils who have SEND are supported effectively. The special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCo) works closely with teachers to share information and strategies to support pupils' learning. Teachers adapt their approaches and break tasks into manageable steps so that pupils can access the curriculum successfully. As a result, pupils who have SEND participate fully in lessons and make good progress from their starting points.
30. Pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) receive diagnostic assessment on entry and targeted language support through preparation for the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) and specialist lessons. Staff support pupils when required through the provision of

appropriate resources such as vocabulary glossaries, structured support for written tasks and clear explanations. These approaches help pupils develop their language skills and engage confidently with their studies.

31. Pupils benefit from a varied programme of extra-curricular activities that support their academic and personal development. Enrichment opportunities include debating, environmental initiatives, medical and engineering clubs, subject booster sessions and university preparation activities. These programmes enable pupils to pursue individual interests and develop independence, collaboration and problem-solving skills. Activity sessions also provide opportunities for pupils to develop communication skills, for example, through debating and podcasting. Boarding pupils participate in additional evening and weekend activities, which further extend their opportunities for recreation and social development.
32. Teachers assess pupils' work regularly through tests, mock examinations and ongoing feedback. Detailed written and verbal feedback helps pupils understand how to improve their work. Leaders share information about pupils' progress with parents through reports and meetings so that parents remain informed about their child's development.
33. Staff monitor pupils' outcomes and provide pupils with targeted support through booster sessions and individual guidance. However, leaders' analysis of assessment information across subjects is not yet fully consistent. The identification of pupils' starting points and subsequent progress varies between departments, which makes it difficult for leaders to evaluate pupils' progress over time across all departments.

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. The school promotes pupils' physical and emotional wellbeing through creating a supportive culture and positive relationships between staff and pupils. As a result, pupils feel safe and supported in the school community. Teaching and non-teaching staff are approachable and attentive to pupils' wellbeing, particularly when responding to issues affecting pupils' personal circumstances or pupils' reactions to wider global events. Tutor sessions, personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) lessons and boarding routines provide opportunities for pupils to discuss topics relevant to their health and wellbeing, including online safety, personal responsibility and managing stress. As a result, pupils develop strategies to support their emotional wellbeing and demonstrate respect for one another within the school community.
36. The PSHE programme contributes positively to pupils' understanding of healthy lifestyles. Lessons address suitable topics including examination stress, mental health, substance misuse, first aid and personal safety. Through these sessions, pupils develop awareness of risks associated with living and studying in a busy city environment and learn practical strategies for managing their wellbeing.
37. Leaders provide opportunities for pupils to take part in some physical activity through enrichment activities and co-curricular sport. However, leaders do not ensure that pupils of compulsory school age experience PE as part of the curriculum. PE lessons are not included within the school timetable for all pupils of compulsory school age to engage with. Although a small co-curricular sports programme takes place off site, participation is limited and this provision does not ensure that all pupils experience PE as part of their curriculum.
38. Behaviour across the school is calm and respectful. Pupils understand the school's expectations for behaviour and behave appropriately. Leaders implement a behaviour policy which sets out clear sanctions and procedures for addressing concerns. Behavioural incidents and safeguarding concerns are recorded through the school's monitoring systems and leaders review serious incidents and communicate expectations to staff. However, leaders' monitoring of behavioural records does not always enable them to identify patterns or emerging trends to target support for pupils as effectively as possible.
39. The school implements an anti-bullying strategy that is communicated through policies, PSHE lessons and pastoral support. Pupils learn about different forms of bullying, including online bullying, and are encouraged to report concerns to staff. Leaders respond to incidents when they arise and provide support to pupils involved.
40. The school develops pupils' spiritual understanding through the curriculum and wider school life. Pupils learn about a range of different religions and beliefs through PSHE and other curriculum areas and have opportunities to reflect on moral and ethical questions, respect different faith traditions and consider their own values and beliefs.
41. The premises are maintained so that pupils' safety and wellbeing are supported. Health and safety procedures, including regular checks and maintenance, are effective. Fire safety arrangements are clear and evacuation procedures are practised regularly. Boarding accommodation provides suitable facilities and living conditions with resident staff supervision and secure access arrangements that

support boarders' safety and wellbeing. However, the school does not provide outdoor space where pupils can play or take part in PE.

42. Pupils are supervised appropriately throughout the school day and within boarding accommodation. Staff ensure that they know boarders' whereabouts at all times. They know pupils well and provide support when needed.
43. Admission and attendance registers are maintained in accordance with the requirements of current statutory guidance. They promote the importance of high attendance.
44. First aid arrangements are well organised. Medical facilities are appropriately equipped and medicines are stored securely. Staff receive appropriate training in first aid. Boarding staff monitor boarders' health and wellbeing closely and provide prompt support should they feel unwell, including overnight.

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

45. Standards are not met consistently with regard to the provision of physical education as part of the curriculum and provision of outdoor space.
46. Standards relating to pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing are not met.
- 47. Not all the relevant Standards are met. A schedule of unmet Standards is included in the report.**

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

48. The school implements a structured programme of human, social and economic education through PSHE, the tutor programme and boarding provision. Leaders review this programme regularly so that it reflects the needs of pupils. Discussions with tutors and PSHE lessons address topics such as personal safety, human rights and responsible behaviour in society. Through these opportunities, pupils develop social awareness and increased confidence in discussing social and ethical issues.
49. The curriculum and wider school activities promote respect for people from diverse backgrounds and beliefs. Events such as 'Culture Day' and celebrations of international festivals enable pupils to share aspects of their heritage and learn about the experiences of others. Leaders provide opportunities for pupils to exchange perspectives and develop their understanding of different cultural traditions. In addition, PSHE, assemblies and elements of the curriculum develop pupils' understanding of diversity and equality and their awareness of discrimination and the importance of respecting different backgrounds, beliefs and cultures. For example, in art and textiles lessons pupils explore artistic traditions and design techniques from different cultures, enabling them to appreciate how cultural heritage influences artistic styles and creative work.
50. Activities such as debating and podcast clubs encourage pupils to discuss contemporary issues and express their views confidently and respectfully. As a result, pupils demonstrate respect towards one another, develop an appreciation of different viewpoints and show tolerance towards those whose experiences and beliefs differ from their own.
51. The school actively promotes British values through the curriculum and wider activities, such as PSHE lessons, assemblies and opportunities for pupils to discuss issues relating to democracy, respect and individual liberty. Pupils develop an understanding of the rule of law and the responsibilities associated with living in Britain. Pupils also learn about civil and criminal law and the role of public institutions through discussions, visiting speakers and civic engagement activities. Visits from local civic leaders provide pupils with further insight into public service roles and responsibilities.
52. Pupils demonstrate an understanding of democratic processes through participation in the pupil council and opportunities to contribute to decisions about school life. Teaching ensures that political issues are explored in a balanced way so that pupils develop informed and respectful viewpoints.
53. Pupils develop their sense of social responsibility through opportunities to contribute to the school community and wider society. Participation in the pupil council enables pupils to present ideas and contribute to discussions about facilities and environmental initiatives. Charity events and fundraising activities help pupils understand how collective action can support causes they value. Through these experiences, pupils develop confidence in expressing their views and recognise that their actions can contribute positively to their community.
54. Leaders with responsibility for boarding life ensure that provision contributes effectively to pupils' social development and preparation for adult life. Pupils learn to live co-operatively within a residential community and respect the needs of others. Boarders develop practical life skills such as managing shared spaces, budgeting and preparing meals. House discussions provide opportunities to reflect on social and cultural issues in a supportive environment. These experiences encourage

pupils to take responsibility for their actions and develop independence in managing their daily lives. As a result, pupils gain increasing confidence in preparing for life beyond school.

55. The school promotes pupils' economic wellbeing through curriculum content and guidance about future pathways. In PSHE and tutor sessions, pupils learn about financial matters such as budgeting, taxation and managing personal finances. Older pupils receive further guidance about financial decision-making in adult life, including student finance, savings, debt and the costs associated with higher education.
56. Careers guidance is integrated across academic and pastoral systems. Pupils receive personalised advice through tutor meetings, academic review sessions and university guidance events. They meet representatives from higher education institutions and receive support with applications, interviews and personal statements. Leaders review the effectiveness of this provision through surveys and reviews of information about leavers' destinations. As a result, pupils develop clear aspirations and are well prepared for higher education and future employment.

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

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

Safeguarding

58. Leaders ensure that appropriate safeguarding arrangements are in place and implemented effectively. Safeguarding is prioritised across both the day and boarding provision and supported by clear procedures. The designated safeguarding lead (DSL) is supported by several deputy DSLs, including boarding staff, to ensure effective safeguarding during the school day and within the residential provision.
59. Leaders ensure that appropriate safeguarding procedures and checks are carried out where boarders live with families in a home environment.
60. Leaders with safeguarding responsibilities respond to safeguarding concerns appropriately. They maintain detailed records of concerns and meet regularly to review cases and determine appropriate action. Governors receive safeguarding reports and maintain effective oversight of safeguarding through regular discussion with the safeguarding team.
61. Staff understand safeguarding procedures and act promptly when concerns arise. They receive safeguarding training at induction and regular updates thereafter, which ensures that they recognise potential safeguarding risks and know how to report concerns, including any low-level concerns or allegations against adults working with pupils. Staff record concerns using a reporting system which enables the safeguarding team to review information and respond quickly. Leaders work effectively with external safeguarding partners and seek advice from relevant agencies when concerns arise.
62. Pupils know how to seek help if they have concerns. They can identify a range of adults to whom they can speak, including teachers and boarding staff.
63. The school operates suitable internet filtering and monitoring systems that help to restrict access to inappropriate content and enable leaders to identify potential safeguarding concerns arising from online activity. Leaders review these systems regularly and follow up any alerts where necessary.
64. Recruitment procedures are typically secure. Leaders ensure that appropriate checks are undertaken for staff and other adults working at the school and that these are recorded on the single central record of appointments (SCR). However, at the start of the inspection, the recording of safer recruitment checks made on a self-employed contractor contained some minor administrative errors. Leaders rectified these before the end of the inspection.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

Schedule of unmet Standards

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

The following standards in this section of the Framework are not met.

Paragraph number	Standard
ISSR ¹ Part 8, paragraph 34(1)	The standard about the quality of leadership and management is met if the proprietor ensures that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school –
34(1)(a)	demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role so that the independent school standards are met consistently
34(1)(b)	fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently; and
34(1)(c)	actively promote the wellbeing of pupils.

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

The following Standards in this section of the Framework are not met.

Paragraph number	Standard
ISSR Part 1, paragraph 2(1)	The standard in this paragraph is met if—
2(1)(a)	the proprietor ensures that a written policy on the curriculum, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work, which provides for the matters specified in sub-paragraph (2) is drawn up and implemented effectively; and
ISSR Part 1, paragraph 2(2)	For the purposes of paragraph (2)(1)(a), the matters are –
2(2)(a)	full-time supervised education for pupils of compulsory school age (construed in accordance with section 8 of the Education Act 1996), which gives pupils experience in linguistic, mathematical, scientific, technological, human and social, physical and aesthetic and creative education;
ISSR Part 5, paragraph 29(1)	The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that suitable outdoor space is provided in order to enable –
29(1)(a)	physical education to be provided to pupils in accordance with the school curriculum; and
29(1)(b)	pupils to play outside.

¹ The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('ISSR')

School details

School	Abbey College Manchester
Department for Education number	352/6044
Address	Abbey College Manchester 5 – 7 Cheapside Off King Street Manchester M2 4WG
Phone number	0161 817 2700
Email address	admin@abbeymanchester.co.uk
Website	www.abbeymanchester.co.uk
Proprietor	Abbey DLD Colleges Ltd
Chair	Mr Tim Haynes
Headteacher	Mr Chris Randell
Age range	14 to 23
Number of pupils	158
Number of boarding pupils	64
Date of previous inspection	21 to 23 March 2023

Information about the school

66. Abbey College Manchester is an independent co-educational, day and boarding school, mostly providing one-year or two-year courses leading to GCSE, A level or further education qualifications. The school is located in the city centre of Manchester, occupying seven floors of a modern office block. It is owned and governed by Abbey DLD Colleges Ltd. The current chair of governors took up his responsibilities in June 2023.
67. The college arranges lodgings with local host families for pupils below the age of 16 on admission. Older pupils may choose to stay with a host family or in boarding accommodation, which is situated within a 10-minute walk from the college.
68. The school has identified 43 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. Five pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan.
69. The school has identified English as an additional language for 99 pupils.
70. The school states its aims are 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, learn to make informed decisions and make a positive contribution to the community.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

3 to 5 March 2026

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

72. Inspection activities included:

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

73. The inspection team considered the views of pupils, members of staff and parents who responded to ISI 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**.

Independent Schools Inspectorate

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For more information, please visit isi.net