

# School inspection report

5 to 7 November 2024

## **Abbey College in Malvern**

253 Wells Road

Malvern

WR14 4JF

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 report each term to the proprietor via the advisory board, which maintains effective oversight of all aspects of school life. Members of the board are suitably trained. They visit the site regularly to ensure that the school is meeting the Standards, achieving its aims and serving the needs of the pupils.
2. Policies are monitored and updated as necessary and at least annually. However, whilst practice mirrors requirements, not all recent changes to statutory guidance related to attendance were reflected in the attendance policy published on the school's website. Leaders rectified this during the inspection.
3. The appropriately broad curriculum is personalised for each pupil, according to their academic needs and with consideration for their future study and careers aspirations. A particular focus on writing, reading, speaking and listening in English ensures that pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) make good progress in their development of English skills and are able to use these to learn successfully in other subjects.
4. Leaders ensure that the curriculum develops pupils' understanding and appreciation of diversity through teaching them about diverse cultures and beliefs. Leaders encourage the celebration of different cultures, and pupils' understanding of others' lives is further informed through living with peers from around the world.
5. Pupils receive a suitable personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education programme which promotes respect for all and encourages pupils' self-confidence. However, relationships and sex education (RSE) content and material has not been developed to best reflect the needs of the oldest pupils in the school.
6. Leaders have put in place a behaviour policy that is well understood and recognised as clear and fair by the pupils. The focus on promoting thoughtfulness towards others, alongside the need to take responsibility for one's actions, promotes pupils' positive behaviour.
7. Pupils have careers education delivered through PSHE lessons and through individual meetings to discuss future pathways. However, younger pupils do not receive as effective and wide-ranging careers guidance as that provided to older pupils.
8. Pupils learn about British culture through the 'citizenship' curriculum, assemblies and weekend trips to various places of interest. However, the activities programme provides very few opportunities for pupils to become involved in the local community.
9. On arrival, boarders are quickly made to feel at home through the individual attention and care given by house staff.
10. Leaders fulfil their safeguarding duties. They ensure that all staff receive regular, appropriate training. Pupils feel supported because leaders listen to them. Leaders and staff respond to any safeguarding concerns promptly and effectively. Leaders make referrals to relevant external agencies when necessary, and within the required time frames.

## 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 that RSE meets the needs of the oldest pupils in the school as effectively as possible
- develop pupils' sense of responsibility towards others by strengthening their opportunities to contribute to the wider community
- provide more effective and wide-ranging careers education for pupils aged 14 to 16 years
- ensure that all policies accurately reflect current practice within the school.

## Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

11. The proprietor, supported by an advisory board, monitors the work of the school to ensure that leaders fulfil their duties and have appropriate knowledge and skills so that the wellbeing of pupils is at the centre of all decision making. The proprietor, through the advisory board, checks the impact of leaders' work through a programme of committee meetings and on-site visits.
12. The leadership team has recently produced a carefully considered development plan, along with an evaluation of key areas of the school, taking into consideration contextual risks. Leaders ensure that externally provided training for staff is available as appropriate. Leaders regularly review the effectiveness of policies and procedures. However, at the start of the inspection, the attendance policy posted on the school's website did not reflect the school's current practice in this area. This was rectified during the inspection.
13. The school complies with its responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010. Leaders ensure that any pupil wishing to take part in particular religious observances may do so. An appropriate accessibility plan is in place which includes the consideration of mobility around the site as well as access to the curriculum. Pupils who speak EAL receive specialist support within a curriculum designed to take their language needs into account. Leaders make reasonable adjustments when required for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).
14. Boarding leaders recognise and provide for the needs of boarding pupils, almost all of whom are experiencing a new cultural context for the first time. Pupils are well known by the boarding staff, who create and maintain an inclusive, friendly environment within which boarders are provided with beneficial pastoral and academic support. Boarders know that they can contact duty staff at all times.
15. Leaders ensure that guardians appointed by families have a clear understanding of the school's requirements for guardianship duties. This is achieved through provision of clear written expectations and discussion of care with guardians. Leaders act on feedback from pupils after exerts as necessary.
16. Parents and guardians are provided with a range of helpful information which is available via the school's website. This includes all required information and news about co-curricular trips. Leaders provide parents with termly personalised reports on pupils' progress, as well as a half-term report in their first term at the school.
17. Leaders have put in place systems for careful, effective risk assessment, both in school and for off-site visits. These cover considerations such as the suitability of communal spaces such as the dining area and the internet café and for the mitigation of potential risks of off-site activities such as ice skating and high ropes. All staff have been trained in risk assessment. They understand the importance of identifying and managing any risks to pupils' safety and wellbeing and know how to do so. This also includes for the welfare of individual pupils.
18. The school has an effective complaints policy. Leaders encourage parents to communicate any concerns as they arise so that they can be acted on swiftly. Very few formal complaints are received. When they do occur, they are handled in line with the policy and recorded appropriately, as are any actions taken as a result.

19. Leaders with safeguarding responsibilities liaise effectively and in a timely manner with external agencies so that pupils may receive suitable support as necessary.

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

20. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

21. The balanced and flexible curriculum takes into consideration the needs of all pupils who speak EAL, whether their acquisition of English is at an early stage or more developed. Leaders ensure that each pupil benefits from a personalised curriculum that offers a suitable variety of academic pathways, takes account of their progress and is adapted to suit emerging needs. The curriculum provides pupils with an appropriate range of subjects in line with the national curriculum. Schemes of work are planned to develop pupils' knowledge methodically so that they can make good progress from their starting points.
22. All pupils take a baseline assessment when they join the school. Leaders use this information to set appropriately aspirational targets. All subject departments track and record pupils' progress. Work is clearly assessed, with teachers providing helpful advice on how it could be improved, which pupils use to inform their learning. Pupils recognise their progress through teachers' targets, helpful comments and the linking of examination assessment objectives to their work. Most pupils achieve well at each stage of their education, including those who have SEND, whose learning needs are known by teachers and staff and effectively supported.
23. External examination results at GCSE, A level and IELTS show that most pupils make good progress in relation to their starting points. Most pupils taking foundation year courses progress to a range of higher education destinations in the United Kingdom and beyond. The school has a particularly established record of art foundation pupils moving on to their first-choice university.
24. Supportive and encouraging teaching in carefully planned and delivered lessons instils confidence in pupils, and successfully engages them in their own learning. Teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge and are adept at adjusting their lessons to ensure that pupils with different levels of English understanding can grasp new ideas. Teaching draws on pupils' existing knowledge and encourages a collaborative learning experience, whilst identifying and supporting the individual needs of each pupil. For example, in English, pupils working to improve their oral fluency practise the use of a range of verb tenses in pairs, after which they are given immediate individual feedback from their teacher.
25. The use of suitable resources and skilful questioning allows pupils to develop their understanding well. Teaching enables effective cross-curricular learning, such as the study of target vocabulary in science, business studies and humanities, in response to any additional language needs that pupils may have.
26. In line with the school's ethos, leaders ensure that lessons take place in a purposeful atmosphere where pupils are encouraged to apply their intellectual effort. They are expected to discuss and debate in class from the outset, in a supportive atmosphere, and this helps them to gain confidence orally. New English learners build everyday vocabulary by describing daily tasks and routines in detail and responding to questions from their peers and teacher. Those whose linguistic skills are further developed are enabled to discuss subject-specific ideas with confidence. For example, in economics, with the help of knowledgeable teaching, Year 12 pupils are able to explain price elasticity in terms of supply and demand. In mathematics, Year 11 pupils justify their calculations when focusing on arc lengths and sector areas.

27. Leaders have recently developed a daily activities programme with plans to expand further. This includes a range of opportunities such as debating, coding, art and music, which allow pupils to develop new and existing skills in the areas chosen.

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

28. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

29. The PSHE programme takes into consideration the international makeup of the pupil body, recognising that learning about PSHE topics may be a new experience for some pupils. Pupils benefit from clear information about the nature and expectations of PSHE lessons, including the importance of listening respectfully to the views of others. Lessons are planned to encourage the development of pupils' self-knowledge and self-confidence alongside education on, for example, living away from home, the influence of social media, strategies to maintain healthy lifestyles and positive mental health and the management of stress.
30. Within the PSHE curriculum, pupils benefit from RSE topics such as the changing adolescent body, consideration of the qualities of positive relationships and, conversely, the features of abusive ones, and how to seek help if affected by these. Pupils learn strategies to deal with peer pressure. They are taught about grooming and how to keep safe online. However, the oldest pupils lack opportunities to consider aspects of healthy relationships as deeply and effectively as possible as they look ahead to the next stage of their lives.
31. The 'citizenship' curriculum encourages students to develop their spiritual and moral understanding. Pupils are encouraged to develop their understanding of global perspectives and character, through research and presentations on figures whom they admire. In assemblies and the humanities, pupils learn about different world faiths and their practices and principles.
32. Leaders educate pupils about the importance of good behaviour clearly and effectively, including through assemblies and the school's 'justice system' booklet. Leaders are clear about the school's expectations, including the sanctions and rewards systems, and pupils understand them well. Leaders and staff encourage an understanding of the importance of personal responsibility and accountability, and as a result most pupils behave thoughtfully at all times. Pupils learn to consider the impact of their behaviour on others.
33. The robust, clear anti-bullying policy is understood by staff and pupils alike. Leaders encourage pupils to flag up any concerns about bullying immediately. On the rare occasion that a bullying incident occurs, it is dealt with swiftly and appropriately. Leaders ensure that both victims and perpetrators are supported by well-trained staff.
34. Pupils are offered the opportunity to develop skills across a range of sports in a weekly timetabled session and in after-school activities. These include volleyball, tennis, dance and gym work.
35. Pupils enjoy learning about each other's cultures and customs through socialising in a central communal boarding common room. Whilst there is no formal prefect system, older pupils are encouraged to be very supportive of new joiners as they experience the challenges of being away from home, possibly for the first time. A dedicated, caring team of house staff know the boarders well, and this pastoral support encourages boarders to grow in self-confidence and self-esteem because they know that they are seen as valued individuals. Boarding accommodation meets the needs of the pupils and is supported by an effective ongoing maintenance and refurbishment programme.

36. Staff supervision of pupils throughout the day and night is effective. In the evening, members of staff are on duty in the welfare centre adjacent to the central common room. Boarding staff supervise boarders overnight and are always contactable on the duty phone. These measures result in pupils feeling safe.
37. Premises and accommodation are suitable. Leaders ensure that expert fire safety recommendations are successfully implemented, and that firefighting equipment is audited and checked regularly. Fire drills are conducted at least once per term, including in the boarding houses. Leaders have put in place routines to ensure that health and safety checks are undertaken routinely, including for electrical and gas safety and legionella. Staff undertake appropriate health and safety training, including fire safety.
38. Leaders ensure that suitable first aid and medical arrangements are in place, including for pupils who feel unwell. An appropriate number of staff are trained in first aid, including in the boarding houses. First aid provision is available at all times, including on school trips.
39. Admissions and attendance registers are suitably maintained. Leaders pay due attention to registering and monitoring pupil attendance. Rare incidents of lateness to lessons or absence are swiftly followed up by leaders to ensure that pupils do not miss learning opportunities. Leaders teach pupils about the potential impact of absence on academic progress. Leaders inform the local authority of any pupils who join or leave the school at non-standard times of transition. They are aware of the need to report any concerns about absenteeism to the local authority when required.

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

40. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

41. Leaders and staff inculcate an ethos of mutual respect, including towards those with protected characteristics. This is reinforced through the 'citizenship' curriculum, which teaches pupils about individual rights and addresses the importance of valuing everyone equally. Pupils compare British laws on equality with practice in their own countries and consider the effect of any differences. They are encouraged to debate their views in order to broaden their understanding of protected characteristics.
42. Pupils learn about the difference between right and wrong. Through 'citizenship' lessons, they learn about the importance of understanding situations fairly and the need for reflection before judgement. Teaching supports pupils to listen to the ideas of others and show consideration for different viewpoints as well as presenting their views on topics such as rights and responsibilities within a community.
43. The school's values of kindness and tolerance align closely with British values such as those of individual liberty and democracy. Pupils reflect on democratic processes and the rule of law in 'citizenship' lessons. They learn about the British electoral system and take part in mock elections. School council and house meeting arrangements allow pupils to take up roles of responsibility. Pupils present ideas intended to enhance their own school experience and that of others. If pupils' requests arising from meetings cannot be met, leaders will clearly explain why.
44. Leaders ensure that pupils are supported to practise their religious faith through meeting specific dietary needs and making arrangements for individual worship time in school and in the wider community, as required. Leaders support pupils to organise a wide range of annual cultural events such as the new year celebrations of different countries. Such events add to pupils' understanding of each other's similarities and differences.
45. Pupils receive suitable economic education as part of the PSHE programme. Topics such as the difficulties arising from gambling and debt are covered alongside more philosophical considerations such as whether or not money matters. Pupils learn how to manage practical financial considerations from their arrival at the school onwards, including setting up a bank account and managing personal finances.
46. Leaders provide individual careers interviews for all, and weekly timetabled sessions on considering and preparing for post-school pathways, including those offered overseas. Pupils learn how to research suitable courses and write well-crafted applications. They also benefit from interview practice. This is particularly appreciated by those applying for higher education courses. However, pupils aged 14 to 16 do not benefit from as effective or wide-ranging careers guidance as older pupils do.
47. Leaders organise a variety of trips in the locality and further afield each term, including to Ledbury and Bristol, so that pupils may learn more about British culture and customs. Pupils learn about the local community through participation in cultural events, such as the Malvern 'well dressing' competition. Annual collaboration with a high school nearby to produce a dance show allows pupils to work creatively with local peers. Nevertheless, association with the wider community is

infrequent. Pupils rarely have the opportunity to develop deeper connections and learn new life skills through volunteering and charitable fundraising.

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

48. All the relevant Standards are met.

## Safeguarding

49. Leaders and staff are committed to the protection and safeguarding of pupils. They ensure that safeguarding arrangements are effective, and that safeguarding policies and procedures reflect current statutory guidance. The proprietor, through the advisory board, maintains effective oversight of safeguarding policies and how well they are implemented through board members' discussions with leaders, scrutiny of annual safeguarding reports and visits to the school.
50. The designated safeguarding lead (DSL) and deputy DSL are suitably trained for their role. Leaders ensure that all staff receive appropriate safeguarding training as part of their induction to the school, including training about the 'Prevent' duty. Subsequently, staff training is updated at regular intervals, and at least annually. Staff are knowledgeable in child protection procedures. They understand the risks posed by radicalisation and extremism, including in the context of their community.
51. Any safeguarding concerns about pupils are reported and logged as required by current statutory guidance. Leaders with safeguarding responsibilities act upon these swiftly and appropriately and record the rationale for decisions taken. Leaders ensure that effective support is in place for pupils, including by referring concerns to relevant external agencies as necessary. Safeguarding records are reviewed by safeguarding leaders so that the school is aware of and can take effective actions with regard to any emerging patterns.
52. Pupils are encouraged to share concerns and are informed of who they can talk to if they are worried for their own or another's safety. They may also report concerns anonymously. Any concerns reported by pupils are taken seriously, and timely and appropriate support is provided to those affected by safeguarding issues.
53. Pupils learn how to stay safe online through the PSHE curriculum and assemblies. The school's appropriate filtering and monitoring systems help safeguard pupils' online learning and activities.
54. Leaders are trained in safer recruitment. All required checks for staff and advisory board members are completed. These are accurately recorded on the school's single central record of appointments.

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

55. All the relevant Standards are met.

## School details

<b>School</b>	Abbey College in Malvern
<b>Department for Education number</b>	885/6026
<b>Address</b>	Abbey College in Malvern 253 Wells Road Malvern Wells Worcestershire WR14 4JF
<b>Phone number</b>	01684 892300
<b>Email address</b>	enquiries@abbeycollege.co.uk
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.abbeycollege.co.uk">http://www.abbeycollege.co.uk</a>
<b>Proprietor</b>	Mr Haleh Mirkamali
<b>Chair</b>	Mr Mehran Noor
<b>Principal</b>	Mr Jeff Smith
<b>Age range</b>	14 to 19
<b>Number of pupils</b>	33
<b>Number of boarding pupils</b>	32
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	2 June 2022

## Information about the school

56. Abbey College is an independent co-educational day and boarding school situated in Malvern. It is a limited company and is owned and overseen by the proprietor, supported by an advisory board, the chair of whom is also the bursar. The current principal has been in post since April 2024.
57. Boarders are accommodated in two single-sex boarding houses on site.
58. The school has identified very few pupils as having SEND. No pupil in the school has an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
59. English is an additional language for almost all pupils.
60. The school states its aims are to foster a community of international understanding and shared values alongside an academic education, and support in English language, which, it intends, will enable pupils to succeed and progress to higher education.

## Inspection details

### Inspection dates

5 to 7 November 2024

61. A team of three inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

62. Inspection activities included:

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

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

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

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

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