

**INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS COUNCIL
(ISC)**

**INSPECTION OF
ABBOTSHOLME SCHOOL**

by the

**INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE
(ISI)**

on

30th April – 3rd May 2007

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

INSPECTION REPORT ON

Abbotsholme School

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|---------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| Full Name of the School | Abbotsholme School |
| DfES Number | 830/6005 |
| Registered Charity Number | 528612 |
| Address | Rocester, Uttoxeter, Staffordshire, ST14 5BS. |
| Telephone Number | 01889 590217 |
| Fax Number | 01889 591001 |
| Email Address | enquiries@abbotsholme.co.uk |
| Headmaster | Mr Steve Fairclough |
| Chairman of Governors | Mr Mark Wells |
| Age Range | 4 to 19 years |
| Gender | Mixed |
| Inspection Dates | 30th April to 3rd May 2007 |

This inspection report follows the framework laid down by the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI). The inspection was carried out under the arrangements of the Independent Schools Council (ISC) Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership. It was also carried out under Section 162A(1)(b) of the Education Act 2002, as amended by the Education Act 2005, under the provisions of which the Secretary of State for Education and Skills has accredited ISI as the body approved for the purpose of inspecting schools belonging to ISC Associations and reporting on compliance with the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003.

The inspection was not carried out in conjunction with the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) and the report does not contain specific judgements on the National Minimum Boarding Standards. It comments on the progress made by the school in meeting the recommendations set out in the most recent statutory boarding inspection and evaluates the quality of the boarding experience and its contribution to pupils' education and development in general. The full CSCI report can be found at www.csci.org.uk.

The inspection does not examine the financial viability of the school or investigate its accounting procedures. The inspectors check the school's health and safety procedures and comment on any significant hazards they encounter: they do not carry out an exhaustive health and safety examination. Their inspection of the premises is from an educational perspective and does not include in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Characteristics of the School

- 1.1 When Abbotsholme was founded as a boys' boarding school in 1889 by Dr Cecil Reddie, he wanted it to provide something different to the prevailing style of education. He pioneered the introduction of arts and handicrafts to the curriculum. He wanted small dormitories and boarding houses, a high pupil-teacher ratio, a friendly and supportive relationship between staff and pupils, cooperation rather than competition between pupils, and a whole-hearted respect for the environment, promoted through camping, hiking and farm work. Much of his vision is still part of the aims of the coeducational boarding and day school for pupils from the age of four upwards into which his original school has developed. Occupying a beautiful estate of some 140 acres on the banks of the River Dove on borders of Derbyshire, the school buildings incorporate both a working farm, in which the pupils are involved, and an equestrian centre.
- 1.2 The school continues to aim at providing a distinctive and inclusive educational experience in which individual pupils are known, have the opportunity to discover themselves, are valued for their particular contribution, and are prepared for life, not just for university. The prospectus identifies the school's goals as being for each pupil to develop a love of learning, to be resourceful, resilient and confident, to develop qualities of kindness and consideration through service, to gain a spirit of adventure through the challenge of outdoor pursuits, to understand the value of responsibility through active participation, to appreciate and respect other cultures, and to see themselves as international citizens.
- 1.3 At the time of the inspection 306 pupils were attending the school, 109 girls and 197 boys. Of these, 144 were boarders, 62 girls and 82 boys. The junior department consisted of 50 pupils below Year 7, 25 girls and 25 boys, and the senior department of 256 pupils, 84 girls and 172 boys. The sixth form numbered 72 pupils, 33 girls and 39 boys. Scores in standardised tests indicate that the average ability of the pupils in the school is broadly in line with the national average. Where pupils are performing in line with their abilities, their examination results should be similar to the average achieved nationally in all maintained schools. The range of ability of pupils studying in the sixth form is, however, significantly wider than is typical for A-level students and the proportion of pupils in the school with specific learning difficulties, mostly dyslexia, is larger than average.
- 1.4 Entry to the school is dependent upon an assessment which consists of an interview and, usually, tests in English, mathematics and non-verbal reasoning. The purpose of the assessment is to determine whether or not Abbotsholme is the right school for each applicant. Pupils enter the school at all ages from the age of four onwards. Those seeking entry directly into the sixth form are expected to have a minimum of 5 GCSE passes at grade C or better. Day pupils come from a wide range of local preparatory and primary schools; boarders may come from far afield, attracted by the school's distinctive educational philosophy, its facilities for outdoor education or its particular provision for children with dyslexia. Four pupils have statements of special educational need. The school has identified a further 100 pupils as having specific learning difficulties, usually dyslexia, of whom 80 receive additional tuition, and 28 for whom English is not their principal language, of whom 15 receive additional tuition in English, the remainder being supported by teachers in their lessons.
- 1.5 The school has undergone significant change since its last inspection in February 2000. The governors decided in September 2002 that the school needed to re-discover the vision of its founder and its relevance for the present day. As a result they reorganised the governing

body and, in April 2003, appointed the present headmaster. The senior management team has been restructured and directors of studies and of extra-curricular activities appointed. The junior department has been extended to cater for pupils from the age of four and rehoused in a dedicated section of the main school building. The curriculum has been reviewed and extended to include much of the outdoor and activities programmes as part of the timetable. Formal teaching on Saturdays has been discontinued. The boarding accommodation has been improved and re-arranged in smaller units, and new accommodation has been provided for the sixth form, again in small units. Most significantly, the school has re-committed itself to its distinctive ethos and educational philosophy.

- 1.6 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school.

2. THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The Educational Experience Provided

- 2.1 The school provides a richly diverse and distinctive educational experience in which individual pupils are well known and valued, thereby successfully meeting its principal aims. Having clarified its educational philosophy and vision, much of the recent development, for example in broadening the curriculum and in providing boarding in small units, has strengthened the school's commitment to its vision and ensured that the school is more successful in achieving its aims than was the case at the time of the last inspection. The lack of a satisfactory school library and of a planned programme of careers education are issues raised at the time of the last inspection that the school is aware of, has tried unsuccessfully to rectify and has plans to address again very soon.
- 2.2 The curriculum at all stages has been improved since the last inspection and the current curriculum provides effectively for the linguistic, mathematical, scientific, technological, human and social, physical, aesthetic and creative development of the pupils and for the acquisition of good speaking, listening, literacy and numeracy skills. The inclusion of subjects like agriculture and equestrian studies in the curriculum meets the particular needs of pupils who have been attracted to the school because of its emphasis on outdoor life and activity, and provides a distinctive element to the curriculum in tune with the school's aims. Both religious and personal, health and social education (PHSE) are part of the curriculum for all pupils up to the end of Year 11. Their inclusion has significantly strengthened the provision for pupils' personal development. However, the provision of these important elements of the wider curriculum in the sixth-form general programme is slighter and less systematically planned, rendering access for all pupils less certain at this stage.
- 2.3 Much of the activities programme takes place within the timetabled curriculum, ensuring that all pupils participate in and benefit from the rich programme available. Some activities, such as working on the school farm, riding, rock climbing and hiking, reflect the school's commitment to the important role of outdoor activity in education for life. The participation of many of the sixth-form pupils in the lambing rota is an example of the unusual but life-enhancing experiences available. The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme is well-supported and provides good opportunities for pupils to undertake community service projects. The school's well-established links with the community and, through its membership of the Round Square, with the international community of schools in membership of that organisation, provide different, challenging and sometimes inspiring experiences that enrich pupils' education; recent examples are visits to a Sikh gurdwara in Derby and to a synagogue in Birmingham and the Round Square trip to Costa Rica, which allowed those participating to experience at first hand life in a very different society.
- 2.4 Two teachers coordinate the careers programme. Specialist outside advice is available on request at key points in a pupil's school career. Suitable work experience is arranged at the end of Year 11. However, no planned programme of careers education has been established and advice about subject choices and higher education, whilst available from a variety of sources both within the school and from outside, often depends on pupil initiative rather than being routinely offered. The school is aware of the continuing need to strengthen provision in this area but has yet to take effective steps to do so.
- 2.5 The curriculum is effectively managed and planned for the whole school as a single entity, which ensures good continuity throughout. Equality of opportunity is strongly promoted by the inclusion of help for those with specific learning difficulties and most activities within the timetable, which is sufficiently flexible to accommodate the needs of individual pupils. Two

of the four classes in the junior department include pupils of mixed year groups. These pose particular challenges for teachers to meet the needs of all pupils. However, the small size of classes and the support of classroom assistants mean that pupils' needs are mostly met successfully.

- 2.6 The provision for pupils with specific learning difficulties is strong and enables many pupils at all stages of the school to progress and achieve well in relation to their abilities. The effectiveness of the support given to these pupils was recognised by parents in their very positive responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire. Those for whom English is an additional language are well supported, usually by teachers adapting their teaching sensitively to meet their needs.
- 2.7 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the curriculum [Standard 1].

Pupils' Learning and Achievements

- 2.8 Pupils achieve well both in the junior department and at GCSE and A level, when their attainment is good in relation to their abilities. Attitudes to learning and behaviour are positive throughout the school. Pupils are confident and articulate, apply themselves well and enjoy working co-operatively. Able pupils are often stretched – an improvement since the last inspection report – and all pupils develop a range of talents, including non-academic talents, in accordance with the school's vision that education is for life. The use of information communications technology (ICT) has improved since the last inspection but it is still not fully developed.
- 2.9 Pupils at all stages are well grounded in knowledge, skills and understanding in their subjects and activities. Pupils in Year 3, for example, demonstrated good literacy skills in writing a letter to an agony aunt, whilst younger children in the class for Reception, Years 1 and 2 were able to count in tens and understood the difference between units and tens in the number 18. They can apply their knowledge and skills both creatively and critically, as was evident at a photographic activity when a group of pupils from Years 10 to 12 made animated films.
- 2.10 The attainment and progress of pupils in the junior department is measured using nationally standardised tests in non-verbal reasoning, mathematics, reading, comprehension and writing. Pupils' achievement in these tests is good relative to their ability. Their overall results are above the averages expected nationally for their ages. The achievement of pupils at GCSE is good relative to their abilities. Results in the three years to 2006 are above the average achieved nationally in all maintained schools. Nationally standardised assessments confirm the good progress made to GCSE level in virtually all subjects. At A level too, pupils achieve results that are good in relation to their abilities, bearing in mind that the school is presenting a significant number of candidates who might not be entered for A level in most schools. Results in the three years to 2006 are in line with the average achieved nationally in all maintained schools.
- 2.11 Pupils with specific learning difficulties, those for whom English is an additional language and the most able all achieve well in relation to their abilities.
- 2.12 Pupils' achievements in extra-curricular activities are a great strength of the school. These cover an extremely wide range from The Duke of Edinburgh's Award gold awards to debating prizes; from reaching the finals of a national electric car championship to international sporting honours. The role of pupils in successfully supervising the lambing season on the school farm must be a unique achievement. Individual pupils experience personal fulfilment and success, and at times excel, in the wide range of activities

- undertaken, in line with the school's goal that pupils should gain a sense of adventure through outdoor activities. Examples include whole school hikes, kayaking expeditions, rock climbing and the first aid qualifications taken by all pupils in Year 9.
- 2.13 Pupils develop appropriate skills and attitudes for study. Pupils of all ages listen and speak effectively. They put forward their ideas confidently and listen to each other's opinions with respect, as was apparent in a Year 9 English lesson on 'challenging thinking' and in a sixth form debate on Tony Blair's achievements as Prime Minister. They write fluently and effectively and, by the time that they reach the senior department, they show good awareness of writing for different purposes and audiences. Pupils throughout the school apply mathematics and mathematical concepts well. Pupils in Years 1 and 2 were observed making good use of number lines and table squares, whilst pupils in a Year 11 geography lesson showed well-developed numerical skills in interpreting statistical data.
- 2.14 The use of ICT as a learning tool across the curriculum is underdeveloped despite a significant improvement in the resources available since the time of the last inspection. Apart from in business studies and religious studies, pupils' books and files do not reveal regular use by the pupils of ICT resources to assist learning, although the lack of an effective library means that, in most subjects, pupils are reliant on use of the internet for research. Good examples of ICT use were observed in graphic design work in art and for photographic animation.
- 2.15 Pupils reason and argue well and, as they mature, increasingly think for themselves. Good examples of independent thinking were noted at all stages of the school as in an experiment with mirrors when pupils in Year 6 predicted the angle of reflection or in a discussion of the film "Educating Rita" when pupils in Year 10 shrewdly analysed the issues raised.
- 2.16 By the time that they reach the senior department, pupils are good at making notes. Effective note taking was observed in several subjects, including business studies and geography. Most are less efficient in organising their files so as to be easy to use for revision. Pupils develop well in their ability to work both independently and co-operatively. Pupils are noticeably tolerant of one another, listening with respect to each other in class without interrupting. Good co-operative working is the expected norm, as was seen particularly in dyslexia lessons with Years 4 and 5, and in senior music and physical education lessons.
- 2.17 Pupils show good levels of application and perseverance. They maintain focus well, even in extended activities. They enjoy their studies and, at interview, speak cogently and enthusiastically about them. Their attitudes and behaviour are highly conducive to effective learning and the achievement of good standards.

Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development of Pupils

- 2.18 The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils is excellent at all stages of the school. The importance of personal development is integral to the school's ethos, which strongly supports the pupils' very good growth in self confidence and self esteem. The school fully meets its aims to develop resourceful, resilient and confident young people, with qualities of kindness and consideration and a spirit of adventure, who understand the value of responsibility, who appreciate and respect other cultures, and who see themselves as international citizens. This aspect of the school has shown significant improvement since the last inspection.
- 2.19 Pupils' spiritual development is excellent. It is very effectively fostered through the extensive outdoor education programme, which frequently promotes a sense of wonder about nature and the wider world, during assemblies, chapel services and religious studies lessons,

and through the high value that the school's ethos places on both individuals and the environment. In one chapel service during inspection week the whole school gathered to hear how the work of poets can influence awareness of the external world from an early age. From Reception onwards, pupils have a very good understanding of the role of religious stories in forming attitudes to life and a recent visit to a synagogue provided pupils with insight into the Jewish faith's reverence for scripture. The religious studies programme is well-planned and ensures that all pupils have some understanding of the spirituality of the major world religions. It does, however, only extend until the end of Year 11, with the result that sixth-form pupils have fewer opportunities to reflect on their developing beliefs and philosophy in a formal setting. Pupils develop a growing sense of self worth and confidence through the regular praise and encouragement given by teachers in lessons. The school's unspoiled rural setting, the frequent musical and artistic activities and trips, such as the recent visit to art galleries in Paris, all provide regular opportunities for spiritual uplift. Pupils have a well-developed respect for the environment in which they live.

- 2.20 Pupils' moral awareness is strong. They have a very good understanding of right and wrong, and of the importance of individual choices. Most pupils receive both religious studies and PSHE lessons on a regular basis. Ethical issues are raised and discussed in these and in other lessons, as was seen in the books of Year 9 pupils writing about the issues surrounding the separating of conjoined twins. Throughout the school, pupils treat one another with tolerance and respect. Pupils in the junior department are trained to be a 'buddy' and help their peers when they have a problem and members of the sixth form provide reliable and quality support in many activities in the junior department as part of their The Duke of Edinburgh's Award. Behaviour codes are displayed for everyone to follow and a behaviour charter has helped to ensure that the conduct of pupils is excellent. Pupils are polite, hold doors open and are responsible in their actions. The whole school is involved in a Round Square project which is enabling a boy in Kenya to be educated. Older pupils willingly participate in a social house building project, and used clothing is sent to help a local charity or to be recycled for the benefit of people in developing countries. Parents responding to the pre-inspection questionnaire were strongly in support of the attitudes and values promoted by the school. The qualities of kindness and consideration highlighted in the school's aims are apparent in the school community.
- 2.21 The social development of pupils is good and derives from the ethos of respect and value for individuals promoted by the school. Pupils, when given responsibility as prefects, heads of boarding houses, head of Round Square or house captains, carry out their duties conscientiously. The challenge of outdoor activities promotes the qualities of resilience and resourcefulness that are part of the school's aims. The school council meets regularly and initiates change across the school, giving those who participate experience of working responsibly for the common good. Members of staff provide excellent role models for pupils in the quality of the relationships that they foster and by the way that they work well together. At mealtimes teachers sit and eat with the pupils, they join in orchestras, plays and school events, they give tirelessly of their time to extra-curricular activities, and they willingly help pupils with problems. All this is in line with Dr Reddie's vision that relationships between staff and pupils should be friendly and supportive. Pupils' understanding of the public institutions and services in England is developed through the PSHE programme and by occasional talks, such as one by a jury foreman recently, and the school has a member, representing the West Midlands, in the United Kingdom Youth Parliament.
- 2.22 Pupils' understanding and appreciation of their own and other cultures are considerable. The school is a multi-cultural community and respect and tolerance for the traditions and beliefs of others are high. Pupils in the junior department celebrate the Chinese New Year and

Diwali in addition to the major Christian festivals and St David's day. They also learn about well-dressing in the local villages. Pupils throughout the school benefit from the well-developed programme of cultural trips in this country and abroad. As part of the religious studies programme, all pupils learn about the major world faiths and subsequently visit their places of worship in Birmingham and other cities. Many pupils travel abroad on the numerous school trips arranged. The school's membership of the Round Square ensures that an unusually wide-ranging international perspective is prevalent. The school's aim that pupils should learn to see themselves as international citizens is well met.

- 2.23 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils [Standard 2].

The Quality of Teaching (Including Assessment)

- 2.24 Teaching throughout the school is effective and contributes positively to the pupils' attainment and progress. Almost all the teaching observed during the inspection was at least satisfactory and the great majority was good or excellent. Lessons are well planned and varied and are characterised by teachers' good subject knowledge and their high level of awareness of the aptitudes and needs of the pupils. A good range of teaching styles and methods is employed, representing an improvement since the time of the last inspection, and teachers generally manage the demands of mixed ability teaching well. As was noted at the time of the last inspection, the regularity and quality of marking in the senior department vary considerably across subject areas and year groups. Marking in the junior department is more reliable.
- 2.25 Teaching enables pupils of all abilities, including those with specific learning difficulties, those for whom English is an additional language and the most able, to increase their knowledge and understanding and to develop their skills. Good support for individual learners is a strong feature of the teaching throughout the school and enables pupils of all abilities to progress well and to gain in confidence. In an English lesson in which pupils in Year 7 were preparing a tourist brochure for 'Abbotsholme Farm', individual pupils were in turn praised, questioned and challenged over their section. The specialised teaching of pupils with specific learning difficulties is very effective and of high quality. It is well complemented by the sensitive way in which classroom teaching is adapted to meet the needs of pupils.
- 2.26 Teaching at all stages is effective in fostering in pupils an interest in and concern for their work, as was evident in pupil interviews and in their books and files. Pupils are encouraged to apply themselves to their learning and to be persistent. At all stages, pupils are challenged to think for themselves as was seen, for instance, both in the creative writing of pupils in Year 3 and in a high-level discussion on the role of women in a trilogy of plays in a sixth-form Spanish lesson, where the teaching spurred pupils on to think through issues and suggest ideas.
- 2.27 Most lessons are carefully planned and proceed at a brisk pace, making efficient use of class time. Teachers use a variety of methods and activities to stimulate interest and curiosity and to provide insight. Some teaching demonstrates real flair, as when pupils in a Year 7 religious studies lesson watched enthralled as the teacher acted out a Jewish family's Friday evening celebration of Shabbat. The significant challenges posed for teachers by mixed-age classes in the junior department are satisfactorily met with lessons that are carefully structured and adequately supported by classroom assistants.
- 2.28 Teachers throughout the school know their pupils and their needs and abilities well. They are adept at adapting their teaching to match the needs of individual pupils. Teachers

throughout the school have very positive relationships with their pupils, which enable questions to be asked and answered without fear of embarrassment. Teaching invariably demonstrates good knowledge and understanding of subject matter. Teachers answer questions clearly, often providing interesting and appropriate examples to illustrate explanations.

- 2.29 Teaching is well supported by a sufficient variety of textbooks, photocopied and practical resources. Some effective resources, such as the GCSE physical education revision booklet, have been written by teachers themselves. Although the lack of an effective school library limits the use of books, resources are mostly used well to enhance teaching. However, few teachers in the senior department make sufficient use of ICT resources to augment their teaching, except as a source of information. Business studies and religious studies are two subjects in which ICT is used frequently and well. The insufficient use of ICT was noted at the time of the last inspection and the school has made progress, particularly in the significantly improved provision of ICT resources, but more remains to be done in promoting the use of ICT by teachers.
- 2.30 Marking in the junior department is regular and helpful. It is an effective tool for informing teachers about pupils' progress and for assisting that progress. As was noted at the time of the last inspection, however, the regularity and quality of marking in the senior department varies considerably both across and within departments. At its best in, for example, English and business studies, it is thorough and offers helpful commentary with targets for improvement. In several departments in the senior part of the school, however, marking is irregular and perfunctory. The school has a policy on assessment that outlines the principles that should determine departmental practice; however, at present, the degree of variation in the interpretation of the policy at departmental level is too great. The school is aware that closer monitoring of marking by senior and middle managers is needed, but that awareness is only recent and measures are not yet in place.
- 2.31 Regular grades for effort and achievement, reported to parents, enable satisfactory monitoring of pupil progress by form teachers, tutors and heads of departments. However, the objective base-line measurements of ability which are undertaken by pupils in Years 7 and 9 are not yet being effectively used as a tool to monitor progress against aptitude, set targets and promote achievement.
- 2.32 Classroom management throughout the school is good and the occasional instances of unsettled behaviour are quickly and sensitively controlled. Expectations with respect to concentration in class and co-operation are high. Teaching encourages pupils of all ages to take responsibility for their own learning and to behave appropriately.
- 2.33 The school meets the regulatory requirements for teaching [Standard 1].

3. THE QUALITY OF CARE AND RELATIONSHIPS

The Quality of Pastoral Care, and the Welfare, Health and Safety of Pupils

- 3.1 Parents and pupils value the excellent pastoral support and guidance provided throughout the school, which reflect the school's aim that pupils should be known and valued as individuals. Procedures for safeguarding pupils' welfare, health and safety are effective but sufficiently robust arrangements for the governors to oversee and review the arrangements have not been established.
- 3.2 Class teachers in the junior department and tutors in the senior department know the small groups of pupils for whom they are responsible very well. The excellent relationships that prevail between teachers and pupils facilitate high quality support and guidance for pupils throughout the school, based on friendly mutual respect. Heads of years underpin and coordinate the work of tutors well, under the direction of the assistant head. The structure is effective and robust and the quality of the care provided is highly regarded throughout the school community. Those pupils who board are also looked after by house parents who are primarily concerned with their domestic life but who, as surrogate parents, may be involved in supporting those pupils experiencing problems with their work or activities. Boarding staff and tutors collaborate well in support of the pupils. Pupils have a clear understanding of the systems in place to support them and, in addition to their class teacher, tutor or head of year, are able to seek help and guidance from the school health advisor or the school listener.
- 3.3 Satisfactory advice on subject choices and applications to higher education is provided by tutors, underpinned by the heads of section. The very supportive relationships that exist between staff and pupils mean that pupils readily turn to a variety of teachers for guidance. However, this openness on the part of teachers at times leads to a lack of clarity and focus in the advice given. Advice on careers is available from external consultants to supplement that provided by the two careers teachers.
- 3.4 School policies and procedures are effective in promoting good discipline and behaviour. Discipline is firm and understated and pupils at all stages learn what is expected of them and behave accordingly, allowing their good manners to appear effortless. Pupils throughout the school believe that the rules are fair and are confident that measures to protect them from any harassment or bullying are effective. Consideration for others and tolerance are apparent in most aspects of school life, in line with the school's stated aims.
- 3.5 Measures to ensure the protection of children are in place and successful. All members of staff are aware of the school's child protection policy and have received suitable training in its application. Staff recruitment procedures are rigorously applied. However, the governors have not yet established a satisfactory process by which they will undertake an annual review of the school's child protection policies and procedures and the efficiency with which the related duties have been discharged.
- 3.6 Health and safety policies are in place and effective, supported by advice from external consultants, which cover whole-school safety and which put particular emphasis on the high risk areas of science, engineering, art and outdoor activities. The farm, whose presence makes the school special, also has special health and safety implications, which are appropriately assessed. Risk assessment is conducted prior to expeditions, trips and activities and appropriate operating procedures are established to minimise risk. However, procedures for regularly reviewing these assessments are not well established. For this reason the school is in the process of establishing a health and safety committee, to be led and chaired by the

- bursar, which will oversee health and safety issues across all areas of school life and ensure that all procedures are regularly reviewed. Until now, however, the leadership and management of health and safety have been shared between various members of the school staff and no proper trail of accountability has been established through senior management to the governors.
- 3.7 Measures for reducing risk from fire are well established and effective. Fire evacuation practices take place regularly and are properly recorded. Liaison with the local fire authority is good and officers from the authority visit the school regularly.
- 3.8 Attendance and admissions registers are correctly and accurately maintained and effective procedures are established to follow up any unexpected absences.
- 3.9 The health advisor plays a valuable role in the health centre, providing medical care and encouraging a healthy life style. The school's work in promoting healthy living has been recognised with a local authority award. The health needs of the pupils are carefully recorded and effective systems are in place to protect those most at risk. For example, many members of staff are trained to alleviate the symptoms of allergy and to give emergency first aid and the names of those trained in first aid are displayed round the school. Appropriate arrangements exist for boarders to see a doctor of their choice in a local medical practice should the need arise.
- 3.10 The catering department provide an attractive choice of food, with healthy options available. Care is taken to ensure that the dining room is a pleasant and civilised venue in which to eat.
- 3.11 The school meets almost all of the regulatory requirements for the welfare, health and safety of pupils [Standard 3]. In order to meet all the requirements, the school must:
- (a) Ensure that the governing body undertakes an annual review of the school's child protection policies and procedures and of the efficiency with which the related duties have been discharged in compliance with DfES Guidance *Safeguarding Children and Safer Recruitment in Education* [Regulation 3.(2)(b)].

The Quality of Links with Parents and the Community

- 3.12 The school has developed excellent links with the parents and the wider community. This represents an improvement on the good links reported at the last inspection. Parents are overwhelmingly supporters of the school, and the vast majority are well satisfied with the education and care that their children receive. Links with the local, national and international community are outstanding and fully support the school's aims to prepare pupils for life rather than just for university or the workplace, and that pupils should learn to see themselves as international citizens.
- 3.13 The responses to the parents' pre-inspection questionnaire were outstandingly in support of the ethos of the school. Virtually all the large number of parents who responded are satisfied with the education and support provided. The strongest support referred to the range of extra curricular activities, the attitudes and values promoted by the school, and the help for pupils with specific learning difficulties. Additionally, a third of the parents responding to the questionnaire added a comment saying how happy they are with the school and how their children are flourishing. The parents made no significant adverse comments. Inspection evidence confirmed the parents' very positive views.
- 3.14 Communication with the parents is frequent and informative. Prospective parents receive high quality and detailed information about the school and are invited to meet the headmaster. Their children are offered the chance to experience a 'taster' day. All parents

receive the excellent annual magazine, 'The Abbotsholmian', a very good termly magazine of events, 'In Touch', and a weekly bulletin. Many parents, particularly in the junior department, value the daily contact maintained through a home-school planner. Parents are also invited to a termly afternoon tea with the headmaster, ensuring that informal links are well maintained. A very useful and informative internet website contains links to more detailed information and, in many cases, email addresses are given to ensure good contacts and speedy responses.

- 3.15 Parents are kept well informed of their children's progress by means of monthly effort and achievement grades, suitably detailed and constructive termly progress reports and regular parents' meetings. Form teachers, tutors, house parents and heads of year are all readily accessible to parents. The school has an effective complaints procedure should it ever be necessary to pursue a matter formally. Parents are well satisfied with the manner in which their concerns are handled.
- 3.16 The parents' association is very effective and organises a full programme of social and fund raising activities. In addition, the school can draw upon the loyal support and help of over 2000 members of the Old Abbotsholmians.
- 3.17 The school has established very good links with the local community. These include involvement with local Brownies, and Guides packs, pupils organising rugby training at a local primary school, music workshops for local schools, Young Enterprise projects and very wide charity fundraising. Many pupils take part in The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme, involving them in community service activities such, for example, as the school's recent work with a Liverpool housing project. The elderly are remembered in harvest festivals, Christmas concerts, as well as being invited to school drama productions, supporting the school's aim to promote consideration for others. Frequent visits are made to local industry and farms, to concerts, theatres, museums and galleries and to a wide variety of places of worship. The school has developed very good sporting links throughout the Midlands and further afield. The school actively promotes good citizenship through its involvement in the Youth Parliament, having just provided the West Midlands spokesperson on education and skills.
- 3.18 International links are outstanding, mainly through the school's membership of Round Square. This organization promotes internationalism, environmental awareness, adventure, leadership and service and links schools around the world. Recent visits to India, Kenya, Costa Rica, New Zealand, Canada, Australia, South Africa, and Thailand, as well as to many places in Europe, illustrate the richness and variety of the links established. Only recently the school hosted a 'What is Life' conference for 65 overseas students from a wide range of countries. Such outstanding links ensure that pupils at all stages of the school meet and correspond with pupils from other countries whose lives are very different from their own. These links contribute greatly to the school's aim to promote international citizenship.
- 3.19 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the provision of information and the manner in which complaints are to be handled [Standards 6 and 7].

The Quality of Boarding Education

- 3.20 The high quality boarding provided is in line with the school's distinctive vision and contributes positively to the educational experience of the pupils. Boarding houses are sympathetically and very well run, providing a lively and supportive environment. Relationships between pupils, house staff and the numerous support staff are excellent, fostering a real sense of family and community. The boarding experience makes an outstanding contribution to pupil development, building self reliance and responsibility. Restructuring and investment in boarding since the last inspection has significantly improved standards, leading to an excellent experience for the pupils.
- 3.21 Relationships between staff and pupils and between pupils of all ages in the boarding houses are friendly and supportive. The active creation of a family atmosphere ensures that pupils feel valued and well cared for in the close-knit boarding community. Senior pupils know the younger pupils well and show concern for them, reinforcing the supportive and inclusive ethos of the school. The boarding houses give pupils significant opportunities for the development of leadership skills, organising competitions and duty rotas. The new sixth-form cabin boarding accommodation has given greater focus to developing independence, self reliance and trust. Pupils enthuse about these opportunities and respond to them with maturity. Experienced and dedicated house staff care for pupils both sensitively and patiently and promote a strong caring ethos in the houses.
- 3.22 The weekend activity programme is well organised and varied. Pupil participation is high. Sporting, adventurous, cultural and team building activities provide enrichment and challenge for pupils of all ages and abilities. The wide range of events has included theatre visits, table football and cookery competitions. Staff participation in the programme is high, and appreciated by pupils and parents. The accessibility of facilities in the evening and informal use for activities such as art, ICT and sport is beneficial and provides pupils with the opportunity to enjoy their social time together.
- 3.23 The accommodation and resources for boarding are very good. The houses are bright, well decorated and comfortable. Pupils are proud of their houses, which they treat with respect and consider their homes. The health advisor, house staff and the food committee have worked effectively to improve the quality, healthiness and quantity of supplies in the food boxes delivered in the evenings and at weekends. This marks an improvement in provision since the last Care Standards Commission inspection (CSCI). Houses are well resourced financially, which allows them to provide a homely and stimulating environment for pupils, including takeaway evenings, cinema trips and numerous competitions.
- 3.24 The most recent CSCI inspection of boarding standards was in December, 2005. All the recommendations of the report following that inspection have been appropriately addressed. Currently, the role of head of boarding has been assumed by the headmaster, who convenes regular meetings of the house staff and oversees consistency of practice across the houses. This arrangement is working effectively.

4. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

The Quality of Governance

- 4.1 Clear sighted and effective governance has enabled the school to make rapid progress over the last four years. Oversight of the school's financial affairs is particularly strong and that, combined with a firm re-assertion of the school's distinctive educational philosophy, has enabled the school to establish a secure position from which to plan its future, a marked improvement since the time of the last report. The governors' oversight of educational, welfare, health and safety issues has been less effective, and they have been insufficiently aware of their own responsibilities in these areas. The governors' work in providing resources, encouragement and support for the school is widely recognised and appreciated as being a significant factor in the school's success in achieving its aims.
- 4.2 The governors meet regularly each term. Individual governors are assigned specific areas of school life, often related to their own professional experience, for which they take responsibility for being well informed, for monitoring and for reporting to their fellow governors. This structure has enabled the governors to act decisively to re-establish the school's vision, and to strengthen the management of its finances but it has not enabled the governors either to be fully aware of, or to fulfil, all their responsibilities, particularly in the areas of welfare, health and safety. Specifically, they have not fulfilled their duty to carry out an annual review of policies and procedures relating to the protection of children, nor have they ensured proper leadership of health and safety, an area that was highlighted in the last inspection report.
- 4.3 Governors have been appropriately involved in school development planning and they have ensured a good and sufficient range of resources to support the school's educational aims. They understand the school and its needs well. Many are parents of pupils in the school, or of recent former pupils. Governors with specific responsibilities are conscientious about visiting the school and meeting the relevant staff. As a result, members of staff feel well supported and appropriately challenged by the governors.

The Quality of Leadership and Management

- 4.4 The headmaster and his senior management team provide strong leadership and effective management. Their clear educational vision has given the school a dynamic sense of direction and enabled it to be highly successful in meeting its aims. The leadership and management of departmental heads are of variable quality, reflecting insufficient emphasis on monitoring to achieve consistency of practice. Parents and pupils are strongly supportive of the ethos, attitudes and values of the school. The leadership and management of the school have improved significantly since the last inspection.
- 4.5 The senior management team is a cohesive and hard working group of managers who are mainly very effective in analysing the schools needs, setting priorities, planning and putting decisions into practice. The school development plan is detailed and helpful and its contents are well known, understood and supported by staff. The plan shows good awareness in many areas, but the management of health and safety is less well addressed, as the school is now aware. The imminent establishment of a health and safety committee under the chairmanship of the bursar is intended to enable clearer leadership and more active management to be exercised in this important area.

- 4.6 Management is mostly effective in drawing up and implementing appropriate procedures and policies and in checking and reviewing their effectiveness. The middle management team is also generally effective in leading and managing their areas of responsibility. House parents are successful in creating the supportive ethos necessary in their houses. Heads of year oversee the work of tutors well. However, in some subject departments policies concerned with marking and assessment have not been fully implemented. The school is aware of this, which was also an issue at the time of the last inspection, and senior managers have started to develop a strategy of closer monitoring and the sharing of good practice. The recent appointment of a head of junior department, yet to take up post, is intended to strengthen the leadership and management of this section of the school.
- 4.7 The school has been effective in securing and supporting well-qualified, experienced teaching and non-teaching staff who are committed, hard-working and concerned for the education and well being of the pupils, and who fully embrace the aims and objectives of the school. A good system for appraising and reviewing performance operates for teachers. The in-service training policy works well, with training needs being identified from appraisal targets. The school intends the review and development process to allow senior managers to direct workloads more effectively. Appropriate induction and training is given to newly qualified teachers, enabling them to achieve fully qualified status.
- 4.8 Finances are well and prudently managed to secure sufficient resources. Textbooks, materials and ICT equipment are adequate and accessible for both teachers and pupils. Key areas of the school have been refurbished and enhanced, notably the boarding accommodation, and considerable investment has been made in a wireless network, all of which has improved the educational provision. Effective systems for the budgeting and monitoring of expenditure for teaching and boarding are in place. The bursar and his team provide good quality information to enable senior managers and governors to plan and make decisions in pursuit of educational aims and to meet the needs of the pupils.
- 4.9 The estate and premises are well maintained and cared for by a committed team of staff and contribute positively to the school's ethos. The unusual provision of a working school farm and an equestrian centre add important dimensions to the educational experience offered, enabling the school to fulfil its vision. However, the day rooms in which pupils gather during the day if the weather is inclement are bare and unwelcoming. They are difficult to supervise and unsuitable for their current use. They do not support the school's aim to value individuals. The school is aware of this and plans to discontinue their use next year.
- 4.10 The day-to-day administration of the school is managed efficiently. Parents, visitors and pupils are made to feel very welcome. Communication is effectively enhanced by the widespread use of email.
- 4.11 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the suitability of proprietors and staff and for premises and accommodation [Standards 4 and 5].
- 4.12 The school participates in the national scheme for the induction of newly qualified teachers and meets its requirements.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

Overall Conclusions

- 5.1 Abbotsholme provides a richly diverse and distinctive educational experience in which individual pupils are well known, very well cared for and enabled to flourish both personally and academically, according to their abilities. The school's membership of the international Round Square group of schools, and the exceptional range of outdoor activities available, enable many of the pupils to experience challenging and enriching situations that contribute significantly to their self confidence and self reliance. The excellent relationships in the school create a happy and supportive learning environment to which the pupils respond well. Skilful teaching helps most pupils, including a significant number with specific learning difficulties to achieve well in relation to their abilities. The high quality of the boarding provision and the uplifting nature of the school's environment contribute positively to the overall educational experience. This is a rapidly improving school, which is benefiting from good leadership and management and strong support for its distinctive ethos and provision from pupils, parents, staff and governors.
- 5.2 The school has made significant progress in many areas since its last inspection in February 2000. In particular, the school has clarified its vision, improved its provision for boarding, strengthened the personal development and pastoral care of the pupils and improved both the academic and the non-academic curriculum. The report following the last inspection identified eight main areas for development. Good progress has been made in five of these areas. More work is required with respect to the remaining three recommendations. These concerned improving awareness of health and safety, providing a careers education programme and improving the library.
- 5.3 The school complies with almost all of the regulatory requirements, but does not at present meet Standard 3 (welfare, health and safety of pupils).

Next Steps

- 5.4 All major aspects of the school in both the senior and the junior departments are good and some are outstanding, but in order to improve its provision further the school should:
1. Strengthen arrangements for monitoring the effective implementation of policies and procedures at all levels so that:
 - governors are more directly involved in the oversight of educational, welfare, health and safety issues;
 - standards of marking and assessment are more closely monitored by both senior and middle managers;
 - better use is made of objective assessment information to monitor the progress of individual pupils and to promote achievement.
 2. Provide a planned programme of careers education, linked to clear advice on subject choices and higher education.
 3. Proceed with plans to provide a new school library as quickly as possible and promote the use of books for both recreation and independent study throughout the school.
- 5.5 In order to meet all the regulatory requirements, the school must:
- (1) Ensure that the governing body undertakes an annual review of the school's child protection policies and procedures and of the efficiency with which the related duties have been discharged in compliance with DfES Guidance *Safeguarding Children and Safer Recruitment in Education* [Regulation 3.(2)(b)].

6. SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE

- 6.1 The inspection was carried out from 30th April to 3rd May 2007. The inspectors examined samples of pupils' work, observed lessons and conducted formal interviews with pupils. They held discussions with teaching and non-teaching staff and with governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended registration sessions, chapel services and assemblies. Inspectors visited the boarding houses, the school farm and the medical centre. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined a range of documentation made available by the school.
- 6.2 A bursar from another school joined the reporting inspector on the second preliminary visit as part of the Independent Schools' Bursars Association (ISBA) scheme, spending the day with the bursar's department. The principal findings have been included in the relevant sections of this report.

List of Inspectors

| | |
|---------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| Mr Rodney Fox | Reporting inspector |
| Mr Peter Dass | Retired headmaster, ISA school |
| Mr Terry Fawell | Retired headmaster, ISA school |
| Mrs Linda Goodhead | Retired head of department, GSA school |
| Mrs Marjorie Harris | Retired headmistress, GSA junior school |
| Mrs Lynne Horner | Headmistress, SHMIS school |
| Mr Martin Lloyd | Director, ISA school |