



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

EDUCATIONAL QUALITY INSPECTION

ABBOTSHOLME SCHOOL

FEBRUARY 2017



SCHOOL'S DETAILS

School	Abbotsholme School			
DfE number	830/6005			
Registered charity number	528612			
Address	Abbotsholme School Rocester Uttoxeter Staffordshire ST14 5BS			
Telephone number	01889 590217			
Email address	enquiries@abbotsholme.co.uk			
Headmaster	Mr Steven Fairclough			
Chair of governors	Dr Paul Kirtley			
Age range	2 to 18			
Number of pupils on roll	289			
	Boys	144	Girls	145
	Day pupils	192	Boarders	97
	EYFS	40	Preparatory	52
	Seniors	149	Sixth Form	48
Inspection dates	08 to 09 February 2017			

PREFACE

The registration authority for independent schools is the Department for Education (DfE), which directs inspection according to a specified frequency or at any time where the DfE has particular concerns about a school. The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is the body approved by the Secretary of State for the purpose of inspecting schools which are, or whose heads are, in membership of the associations which form the Independent Schools Council (ISC) and reporting on the extent to which they meet the Independent School Standards ('the standards') in the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

All association independent schools will have an inspection within three years from April 2016, in accordance with the Framework and DfE requirements. The inspection may be of COMPLIANCE ONLY or a combined inspection of EDUCATIONAL QUALITY AND COMPLIANCE depending on a number of factors, including findings from their most recent inspection. Schools judged not to meet the standards following their inspection may also be subject to a progress monitoring visit before their next routine inspection. The progress monitoring visit will judge whether the school has taken the necessary action to meet any un-met standards identified at their previous inspection.

Inspections do not include matters that are outside of the regulatory framework described above, such as: an exhaustive health and safety audit; compliance with data protection requirements; an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features; contractual arrangements with parents; an investigation of the financial viability of the school or its accounting procedures.

The inspection was also carried out under the arrangements of the ISC Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership.

This is an EDUCATIONAL QUALITY inspection, reporting on the quality of the school's work. It focuses on the two key outcomes:

- The achievement of the pupils, including their academic development, and
- The personal development of the pupils.

Since the school was last inspected, the framework for inspection has changed. The current inspection framework uses different criteria and arrangements for grading from those used in previous inspection frameworks. The judgements made on this inspection are, therefore, not directly comparable to judgements made on previous inspections.

Inspectors may be aware of individual safeguarding concerns, allegations and complaints as part of the inspection process. Such matters will not usually be referred to specifically in the published report but will have been considered by the team in reaching its judgements.

All inspections of independent schools in England are conducted according to the requirements of the Independent School Standards Regulations. However, different inspectorates apply different frameworks that are suited to the different types of schools they inspect. The ISI terminology reflects quality judgements that are at least equivalent to those used by the national inspectorate, Ofsted. ISI reports do not provide a single overarching judgement for the school but instead give a clear judgement about key outcomes for pupils and information on the quality of the school's work.

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

INSPECTION EVIDENCE

The inspectors observed lessons, conducted formal interviews with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with members of staff and the chair of governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period and attended chapel. Inspectors visited boarding houses and the facilities for the youngest pupils, together with the learning support and educational resource areas. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined curriculum and other documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Mrs Roberta Georghiou	Reporting inspector
Dr Richard Brookes	Team inspector (Deputy headmaster, HMC school)
Ms Heather Fulton	Team inspector (Head of pre-prep, IAPs school)
Mr David Holland	Team inspector (Headmaster, Society of Heads school)
Mr Keith Metcalfe	Team inspector for boarding (Deputy headmaster, HMC school)

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1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

About the school

- 1.1 Founded in 1889 and situated in rural Derbyshire, Abbotsholme is an independent day and boarding school for boys and girls aged between 2 and 18. Its board of governors works closely with a consultative committee. Facilities include a farm and equestrian centre. Boarding is in four houses; one for boys, two for girls and one, consisting of five log cabins, is for sixth form girls and boys.
- 1.2 Since the previous inspection the school has improved the sports facilities, the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) has been extended, and the school has appointed a new preparatory school head.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.3 The school's aim is to provide a balanced education which includes a strong academic curriculum, an extensive range of extra-curricular activities, an understanding of the natural environment, and cultural awareness so that pupils become responsible, socially aware and able to face an increasingly demanding world confidently.

About the pupils

- 1.4 Day pupils come from a range of professional and farming backgrounds, mostly from White British families living within a 30-mile radius of the school. Boarders come from 10 overseas countries and from homes throughout the UK.
- 1.5 Nationally standardised test data provided by the school indicate that the ability of the pupils in the preparatory school and the senior section up to Year 11 is broadly average. In Years 12 and 13, the pupils' ability profile is below the average for pupils taking A-level courses.
- 1.6 The school has identified 117 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) which include dyslexia and dyspraxia, of whom 94 receive additional specialist support. It also has 4 pupils with an education, health and care (EHC) plan or a statement of special educational needs. English is an additional language (EAL) for 29 pupils, 23 of whom receive additional support for their English. Data used by the school have identified 15 pupils as the more able in the school's population, their needs are met within lessons. A further 14 pupils have special talents especially within sport, and the curriculum is modified for them where appropriate.
- 1.7 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school.

Recommendations from previous inspections

- 1.8 The previous full inspection of the school by ISI was a standard inspection in April and May 2011. The recommendations from that inspection were:
- Improve teaching to the quality of the best by sharing good practice, closer monitoring of classroom practice, setting targets for the improvement of teaching and evaluating progress towards them.
 - Improve the management of the junior division to provide further opportunities for pupils' academic and personal development.
 - Fully implement the EYFS curriculum so that all areas of learning can foster independent thinking, inquiry skills and decision making.
 - Develop the indoor and outdoor EYFS environments to enhance children's learning opportunities and to provide planned, purposeful play and exploration.
- 1.9 The school has successfully met all the recommendations of the previous inspection.
- 1.10 The recommendations of the intermediate boarding inspection in March 2015 were:
- Refine the clarity and consistency of line management of boarding staff across all houses to improve their effectiveness.
 - Develop a more rigorous boarding appraisal process to focus on measurable targets and training.
- 1.11 The school has successfully met all the recommendations of this inspection.

2. KEY FINDINGS

2.1 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is good.

- Pupils have positive attitudes to learning.
- Pupils' skills in information and communication technology (ICT), and in communication are highly developed.
- Pupils achieve highly in their activities outside the classroom.
- Pupils in the senior school do not always make the progress of which they are capable.
- Pupils do not all develop fully their higher order thinking skills.

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

- Pupils demonstrate high levels of self-knowledge and confidence.
- Pupils make an excellent contribution to their school and wider community.
- Pupils strongly uphold their school's values and display respect for those from different backgrounds and traditions.
- Pupils achieve a well-balanced lifestyle and embrace the challenges of their outdoor education.

Recommendations

2.3 The school is advised to make the following improvements:

- Ensure that teaching provides pupils with opportunities to develop their higher order thinking skills.
- Use the available data on pupils' starting points to ensure that all make good progress within the senior school including the sixth form.

3. THE QUALITY OF PUPILS' ACADEMIC AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS

- 3.1 The quality of pupils' academic and other achievements is good.
- 3.2 This represents in most respects successful fulfilment of the school's aims to provide a balanced education, which includes a strong academic curriculum.
- 3.3 Pupils have positive attitudes to learning. They respond enthusiastically to the teaching which offers encouragement, understands and responds to their individual needs, and in the best lessons provides challenge. At all stages they work effectively together and demonstrate initiative and independence. For example, children in the EYFS enjoy designing tasks together to achieve their goals, and have very good concentration during their phonics learning. In the junior school, pupils respond enthusiastically to activities designed to help them in their learning such as a movement game in French. In the senior school, pupils experiment well in science and collaborate effectively to record results. In Years 12 and 13, pupils persevere to solve complex problems and respond positively to the advice of their teachers.
- 3.4 Results in GCSE examinations in 2013-15 for which national data are available have been in line with the national average. Results at A level have been below the national average. The 2016 results at both A level and GCSE indicate improvement. Around half of the sixth form successfully take BTEC examinations in three subjects.
- 3.5 From observation of their activities and standardised data provided by the school, children in the EYFS meet the expectations for their age by the time they enter Year 1. Pupils in the preparatory school do not take national curriculum tests, but from the available evidence they are judged to make good progress. Using the results in GCSE examinations and the overall ability profile of pupils in the senior school, pupils make progress which is appropriate in relation to the average for pupils of similar abilities. From the most recent results in A-level examinations and overall ability profile of the sixth form, pupils make progress at A level which is appropriate in relation to the average for pupils of similar abilities. The data available to the school are used to track the progress of individual pupils from their starting points, but opportunities to use it to raise performance are not always successfully taken.
- 3.6 In responding to the pre-inspection questionnaire, a small minority of pupils did not agree that the marking helps them to improve their work. Inspection evidence gained from observation of lessons and work scrutiny indicated that marking usually offers advice and appropriate guidance to improve. Data provided by the school demonstrate that pupils with SEND achieve broadly in line with their peers. Pupils with SEND make this good progress as their needs are identified, their progress is carefully monitored, teaching responds to their individual needs, and in some cases the curriculum is adapted to allow them greater time to develop their skills within the learning support department. Data provided by the school indicate that pupils with EAL make progress that is broadly in line with their peers. This is the result of such pupils receiving appropriate support by specialist teaching, and due to their boarding experience providing them many different opportunities to develop their confidence in spoken English. More able pupils achieve highly, in line with expectations. The majority of pupils leaving in Year 13 gain places at university; some take a gap year or continue in other forms of education, while others enter employment.

- 3.7 The pupils' basic skills for learning are good across the areas of learning which are well represented in the balanced curriculum. Pupils of all ages including the very youngest children in the EYFS communicate confidently with adults and one another. Pupils in Years 1 to 4 become secure in their reading, and those in Years 5 and 6 demonstrate high levels of skill in order to write both meaningfully and creatively. Senior school and sixth form pupils are very confident in giving presentations to their peers and before adults. Their writing is fluent and accurate, and allows them to express views clearly. Their linguistic skills in a foreign language are assured. Teaching encourages pupils' communication. Pupils are provided many opportunities to discuss and exchange ideas with their teachers and peers, both in lessons and within extra-curricular activities. Pupils' mathematical skills develop appropriately for their ages. Children in the EYFS readily use numbers in their daily activities, and sort and count to numbers beyond 20. Pupils in Years 1 and 2 confidently create three-dimensional figures from shapes, while those in Year 6 use mathematical terms accurately and understand processes such as rounding, partitioning and place value. Pupils in the senior school, including the sixth form, apply their mathematical skill confidently in other subjects such as science and geography. Their mental arithmetic is confident and they can perform more sophisticated functions such as forming algebraic expressions from written information.
- 3.8 Pupils of all ages are highly skilful in their application of technology. Children in the EYFS are able to manipulate tools confidently. Pupils in Years 5 and 6 use technical language to describe processes in science. Senior school pupils engage capably in experimental work, for example in science and photography. In some science lessons, pupils were not as assured in using technical language to explain processes. Pupils of all ages are highly skilled in their application of ICT. Pupils in Years 1 and 2 enjoy using computer programs to help them count and learn sounds. Senior school pupils use their tablet computers for independent research, to organise their work, and to edit and refine their writing. Pupils from Years 6 to 11 relish opportunities to use code to create games, and some in Year 10 have sufficient skill to become 'digital leaders' and support younger pupils.
- 3.9 Pupils' technological skills are highly developed as they are encouraged at all times to employ ICT in their work, and they have further opportunities to do so within their activities programme. Sixth form and senior school pupils with SEND described the provision of ICT within the school as an indispensable resource for their way of working, and they particularly valued the school's online learning environment as it helps them organise their work, find resources and communicate with staff.
- 3.10 Pupils of all ages have well-developed creative skills, seen particularly in the high quality of their art work. They enjoy physical challenge in activities such as climbing and perform confidently in sport, demonstrating high levels of fitness and sport-specific skills during competitive fixtures. Pupils benefit from a wide-ranging programme in sport which offers many opportunities to play at varying levels, and from the extensive outdoor programme which challenges them to develop their physical abilities to the full.

- 3.11 Pupils acquire effective skills for study. Children in the EYFS consider their tasks carefully and discuss them with their teachers in order to improve. They enjoy taking the initiative and designing tasks in their outdoor area, and they work collaboratively to achieve their goals. Pupils in Years 1 and 2 concentrate well and make decisions, such as when choosing colours to use in art. Senior school pupils draw their knowledge from a variety of sources, especially from the internet, and they are confident in carrying out research together independently to complete projects. They collaborate well: for example, Year 9 pupils carried out independent research on the effects of smoking. Similarly, Year 12 pupils worked together in an agriculture lesson to herd sheep into a pen in order to test them for fat content.
- 3.12 Pupils work together productively due to staff offering encouragement and appropriate praise and, in the best lessons and activities, challenging them well. Pupils are also supportive of one another and appreciative of each other's achievements. Observation in lessons and of pupils' books indicated that tasks set do not always allow pupils to develop higher order thinking skills. Pupils are not always challenged to pursue fully their answers to questions within some lessons and homework exercises. Those with SEND display considerable determination in acquiring new skills which will help them overcome their difficulties. Teaching fully supports these pupils' efforts to study independently by providing resources and additional help as needed.
- 3.13 Pupils achieve well in their activities and competitions outside the classroom, and highly in sport. In their questionnaire responses, all parents and the great majority of pupils agreed that the school provides a good choice of extra-curricular activities. Pupils in Year 6 and within the senior school have been successful in mathematics challenges, while pupils in the senior school have gained awards in speech and drama examinations. They have had success in a local debating competition, and speech and drama festival, and have been national finalists in a technology competition. From Years 10 to 13, pupils have had considerable success in The Duke of Edinburgh's Award (DofE) scheme. In 2016, 17 Year 13 pupils gained the gold award, representing the majority of the year group.
- 3.14 Pupils' success in sport is significant. In hockey, Years 3 and 4 are mixed county champions, Year 5 and 6 girls are county champions, and Year 5 and 6 girls and boys are regional champions. Year 5 and 6 are mixed athletics regional champions. In the senior school, Years 7 and 8 girls are indoor athletics county winners, and under-15 girls are county cricket champions. Year 6 and 7 pupils have won individual and team medals in national schools orienteering competitions, and senior pupils have reached the national finals in fencing. Representative honours at national level have been earned by senior school girls in cricket, hockey and netball, and at regional level by boys in hockey. At county level, honours have been gained by girls and boys in hockey, and by boys in cricket, swimming and rugby. This success in sport and other activities represents considerable dedication on the part of the pupils, who benefit from the very wide provision of extra-curricular activities and the commitment of the school's staff.

4. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

- 4.1 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 4.2 This fully reflects the school's aims to ensure that pupils become responsible and socially aware young men and women, able to face an increasingly demanding world with confidence.
- 4.3 Pupils are self-aware and confident. Children in the EYFS successfully chose materials to create and construct models. Pupils in Years 1 and 2 worked independently to create a print-design board, and those in Years 3 and 4 described how they develop their resilience through challenges such as the climbing wall. They recognise that teaching also encourages them to improve their own learning. Pupils in Year 5 are proud of the decisions they have made through their school council. Senior school pupils gain self-confidence through activities such as drama and public speaking. They choose their activities and subjects with careful thought on how they may benefit from them.
- 4.4 A small minority of pupils who responded to the questionnaire did not agree that they receive good advice about their subjects or career. Inspection evidence concluded that pupils have been provided clear information. Older pupils said they had received full, unbiased advice when making choices of subjects. They had participated in a helpful careers survey, work experience and a careers event. Older pupils also expressed that the range of activities they had been able to participate in was good preparation for university and life beyond school. Reflecting upon their time in school, sixth form pupils recognised that they had been provided freedom to decide how to use their time, and that this was preparing them for the future. Pupils gain high levels of self-confidence due to the school affording them opportunities to make choices about their activities and how they spend their free time. The school also provides activities particularly within outdoor education which challenge pupils, such as residential camps and hikes. Boarding helps pupils to develop their resilience and independence as they make their own decisions and take responsibility for their actions, and learn to make use of the available support within their houses.
- 4.5 Pupils are socially aware and make an excellent contribution to their school and wider community. They work very well with their peers, with pupils of other ages and with those from other schools whom they meet in activities abroad which are organised by a worldwide network of 160 schools from different countries. Children in the EYFS listen to one another and collaborate within their activities, for example when gathering materials and constructing a moat in the outdoor play area. Pupils of all ages express concern for one another's feelings. Those in Years 3 and 4 enjoy contributing as 'monitors' with responsibilities such as distributing resources and keeping dining tables clean. They act as readers for younger children and 'buddies' for new pupils while also appreciating the help of older pupils.

- 4.6 Pupils from Years 1 to 6 have all contributed to charities at home and abroad, for example by participating in sponsored events or donating their toys. All pupils are committed to the charities they support. Senior school pupils raised money through a fundraising canoe marathon from Devizes to Westminster. Pupils from Year 10 to 13 have a high regard for the opportunities they have for service, for example through DofE and in Year 13 as prefects within school. Within the senior school, boarders speak very highly of the positive environment in which they live; they regard working together as a way of life and describe their houses as 'family'. Boarders put forward recommendations to their boarding forum or council in order to improve the experience for all. Pupils are supported in all their charitable and social endeavours by staff who willingly give their time to provide required supervision and resources, and by the leadership and governance of the school. The latter set high expectations of pupils through the school's aims and values, and ensure that their contributions are acknowledged, for example in school reports, directly to parents and on the website.
- 4.7 Pupils strongly uphold their school's values and display respect for those from different backgrounds and traditions. Pupils have a clear moral understanding. All, including the very youngest, respect the rules and can distinguish right from wrong. They respond very well to school values; for example, Year 5 pupils described the qualities expected of them as respect, honesty, humility, integrity and courage. In responding to the questionnaire, most of the pupils agreed that the school encourages them to behave well and that they understand the sanctions for poor behaviour. A small minority said that the school did not treat them fairly. Pupils speaking to inspectors did not agree. They said that they were treated fairly, although some inconsistency might occur with minor misdemeanours. Scrutiny of school behaviour logs showed that occurrence of serious misbehaviour is rare and that sanctions are fair. The very large majority of pupils agree that the school teaches them to respect other people and they demonstrate this in their behaviour. Pupils help one another, are friendly and respectful and take responsibility for their own behaviour.
- 4.8 New pupils, including those who come from abroad at different entry points, all feel welcomed when they arrive. Pupils with EAL become fully involved with activities in the boarding houses and in British cultural experiences, thereby enhancing their language skills. Pupils celebrate different traditions such as those associated with the Chinese New Year. Pupils in Year 7 showed in discussion their understanding that attitudes to moral issues may vary between cultures, and all pupils respond sensitively to one another's learning needs and differences. All parents responding to the questionnaire felt that the school actively promotes the values of democracy, respect and tolerance. Inspectors agree that such values are evident in the behaviour of the pupils.

- 4.9 Pupils of all ages appreciate the importance of a well-balanced lifestyle. They know how to stay safe and healthy. They embrace the challenges of their outdoor education. Older pupils said that exercise is intrinsic to their education. They value highly both the school farm and equestrian centre in supporting their physical and mental health. They take responsibility for the care of animals, showing a deep understanding of man's relationship with nature. They express great pleasure in the natural environment and the beauty of their surroundings and show appreciation for the non-material aspects of life, such as art and music. Older pupils lead assemblies and encourage their peers to reflect upon the experience they gain from expeditions. From a young age, pupils understand about making healthy choices, supported by the variety and quality of food they receive. Boarders enjoy their supper boxes and making their own food. Pupils are confident that they know how to stay safe, and appreciate the advice they are given in the school's life, religion and citizenship programme. They understand e-safety and accept the need for responsibility in the use of mobile phones and taking of digital photographs. Boarders said they feel safe in the houses and very well supported emotionally. Pupils trust the tutors, house parents and staff who care for them.
- 4.10 By the time they leave school, pupils are responsible and socially aware. They are self-reliant and respectful of others. They are resilient, keen to respond to challenges and ready to face an increasingly demanding world with confidence.