



INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

ABBOTSHOLME SCHOOL

**BOARDING WELFARE
INTERMEDIATE INSPECTION**

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

Abbotsholme School

Full Name of School	Abbotsholme School
DfE Number	830/6005
EYFS Number	EY442917
Registered Charity Number	528612
Address	Abbotsholme School Rocester Uttoxeter Staffordshire ST14 5BS
Telephone Number	01889 590217
Fax Number	01889 591001
Email Address	stevefairclough@abbotsholme.co.uk
Head	Mr Stephen Fairclough
Chair of Governors	Dr Paul Kirtley
Age Range	2 to 18
Total Number of Pupils	353
Gender of Pupils	Mixed (183 boys; 170 girls)
Numbers by Age	0-2 (EYFS): 18 5-11: 66 3-5 (EYFS): 42 11-18: 227
Number of Day Pupils	Total: 234
Number of Boarders	Total: 119 Full: 49 Weekly: 70
Inspection Dates	17 March 2015 to 19 March 2015

PREFACE

This inspection report follows the *ISI schedule* for intermediate inspections, focusing primarily on compliance with the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools (NMS). The inspection occurs over a period of two and a half continuous days in the school.

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is the body approved by the Secretary of State for the purpose of inspecting schools belonging to the Independent Schools Council (ISC) Associations and reporting on compliance with the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, as amended. This inspection focuses on the school's compliance with the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools. It comments on the progress made by the school in meeting the recommendations set out in the most recent statutory boarding inspection.

The inspection of the school is from an educational perspective and provides limited inspection of other aspects, although inspectors comment on any significant hazards or problems they encounter which have an adverse impact on children. The inspection does not include:

- (i) an exhaustive health and safety audit
- (ii) an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features
- (iii) an investigation of the financial viability of the school or its accounting procedures
- (iv) an in-depth investigation of the school's compliance with employment law.

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 in the published report but will have been considered by the team in reaching their judgement.

INSPECTION EVIDENCE

The inspectors conducted formal interviews with boarders, held discussions with senior members of staff and with governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period and attended registration sessions. Inspectors visited the boarding house and the facilities for sick or injured pupils. The responses of parents and boarding pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined regulatory documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Mrs Ruth McFarlane	Reporting Inspector
Mrs Sarah Gomm	Team Inspector for Boarding (Deputy Head, HMC school)
Mr Paul Johnson	Team Inspector for Boarding (Former Senior Housemaster, HMC school)

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1. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

- 1.1 Abbotsholme was founded as a boys' boarding school in 1889. It is now a co-educational boarding and day school for pupils aged from two to eighteen years. It is situated in 140 acres beside the River Dove near Uttoxeter. The facilities for boarders include a working farm and an equestrian centre. A board of governors is overseen by a consultative council.
- 1.2 The school aims place strong emphasis on personal development, relationships with others, and learning by doing, as well as through academic study. It seeks to provide an holistic education, with opportunities for balanced academic, personal and social development. It sets out to emphasise the building of knowledge, understanding of the environment, recognition of the needs of others, appreciation of wide-ranging cultures and a courageous response to challenge. The school also aims to promote resilience and self-confidence, and international experiences through service, conferences and adventures abroad, and engagement in community service.
- 1.3 At the time of the inspection 353 pupils were on roll. Of these, 119 were boarders (62 boys and 57 girls) aged from 9 to 18, accommodated in 5 boarding houses on the school site: Two of the boarding houses accommodate junior boarders: Flaxfield, for girls from nine to thirteen years, and Cedarholme Junior, for boys from nine to thirteen years. Two boarding houses are for senior boys: St Vincent's and Cedarholme. Orchard is a senior boarding house for girls aged fourteen to sixteen. In addition, five self-contained, detached three-bedroom lodges, for groups of six male or female sixth-formers, are collectively known as Barnfield. These units have kitchens and bathrooms as well as lounges with study and leisure areas, including televisions.
- 1.4 Boarders come from a wide area, including overseas. There are 16 pupils who receive support for English as an additional language (EAL). The school has identified 145 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), mostly dyslexia, of whom 117 receive additional tuition and 44 are boarders. Two pupils have a statement of special educational needs, one of whom is a boarder.
- 1.5 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school.

2. SUMMARY

(i) Compliance with regulatory requirements

2.1 The school meets all the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools 2013.

(ii) Recommendations for further improvement

2.2 The school is advised to make the following improvements.

1. Refine the clarity and consistency of line management for boarding staff across all houses to improve their effectiveness.
2. Develop a more rigorous boarding appraisal process to focus on measurable targets and training.

(iii) Progress since the previous inspection

2.3 The previous boarding welfare inspection was undertaken by Ofsted in April 2011. Not all of the National Minimum Standards were met. The school has dealt with the three points required, regarding contacting staff at night, the monitoring of risk assessments and the assessment process for boarders who administer their own medication.

3. COMPLIANCE WITH NATIONAL MINIMUM STANDARDS

3.(a) Boarding provision and care

- 3.1 The school meets all of the NMS under this section.
- 3.2 All boarders receive appropriate induction through documentation and staff support. 'Buddies' help boarders to settle. A few boarders indicated in response to the questionnaire that teachers do not show concern for them, they do not have an adult to turn to, they do not get on well with other boarders and they do not enjoy boarding. A careful check of records and observations showed that staff are available and boarders readily turn to them for guidance or help. Contact details for all appropriate outside helplines are displayed in each boarding house. [NMS 2]
- 3.3 Policies for medical matters and the well-being of boarders, including for chronic conditions and disabilities, meet the latest guidance and are consistently applied. The medical centre includes the required facilities and qualified staffing. External health professionals are also available, including optometrists and other specialists. First aid and household remedies are administered appropriately. Records are appropriately maintained to ensure that prescription medicines are given only to the correct boarder. Medical confidentiality is respected. Assessment determines the right to withhold or give consent to treatment, as well as competence to self-medicate, in response to action required at the previous inspection. [NMS 3]
- 3.4 Boarders use mobile telephones, email, landline telephones or suitably controlled internet facilities to readily contact their families and friends outside school. [NMS 4]
- 3.5 All boarders have suitably lit, heated and ventilated sleeping accommodation, with nearby private toilet and washing facilities. Reasonable accessibility adjustments are made when necessary for boarders with SEND. All areas are effectively maintained and sufficiently spacious, and provide space for boarders to relax as well as study. Bedding is suitably clean and warm. Accommodation for boys is appropriately separate from that for girls. All accommodation is protected from unauthorised persons, being reserved for the boarders intended to use it. Every boarder has an area that may be, and is, personalised. A few boarders commented in their questionnaire responses that they do not feel safe in their boarding house. Inspectors checked all the accommodation thoroughly for safety and found that it meets requirements. Security measures do not intrude on the privacy of the boarders. [NMS 5]
- 3.6 A minority of boarders said that the food is not good and a small minority that they are not happy with the provision of snacks. Inspectors checked menus, and both observed and sampled the food being served in the hygienic kitchens. They found that variety and choice and ample quantities of food are available. Specific dietary needs, for example, for medical or religious reasons, are catered for. Water labelled for drinking is available throughout the school. Boarders' kitchens enable boarders to prepare an appropriate range of snacks, which include cereals, cakes, fruit and pizzas. [NMS 8]
- 3.7 All bedding and clothing are regularly laundered on the premises and systematically returned to the correct boarder. Toiletries or stationery requisites are available in house. A small minority of boarders said that their belongings are not safe. Inspectors observed that valuable possessions are kept safe by staff. Pocket money is also looked after and given out as required. All boarders have a lockable

cupboard, which most use. Inspectors concluded that the arrangements to keep boarders' belongings safe are suitable. [NMS 9]

- 3.8 A small minority of boarders stated that there is a lack of balance between free time and activities. Inspectors observed the arrangements and checked the programme. They concluded that there is an appropriate balance between the wide range of activities and free time. Boarders can use the school grounds and indoor facilities for organised activities, or be alone in a safe environment if they prefer. They may visit the local town at the weekend. Television, radio and newspapers are provided for boarders to keep them aware of events in the world outside school. [NMS 10]

3.(b) Arrangements for welfare and safeguarding

- 3.9 The school meets all of the NMS under this section.
- 3.10 The written health and safety policy is regularly revised to respond to the latest guidance. Its content is implemented effectively in all areas. The various sites and buildings are carefully maintained using an efficient system that ensures prompt attention to any repair or hazard. This enables all facilities and premises to be maintained to ensure, as far as is reasonably practicable, the welfare, health and safety of all the boarders. Risk assessments noted as not evident at the previous inspection have been fully put in place. [NMS 6]
- 3.11 Drawing on external experts when necessary, as well as on trained staff, all necessary measures are taken to assess and reduce the risk of fire. All required records are kept, including of the periodic testing of all equipment. Regular fire drills take place, including during boarding time. [NMS 7]
- 3.12 Measures to safeguard the welfare of the boarders follow the latest guidance carefully and are kept up to date. Policies are correctly implemented. Staff training meets all the requirements, both when they start at the school and at appropriately regular intervals thereafter. Governors conduct a termly review of the policy and of the procedures. [NMS 11]
- 3.13 The school has clear and effective policies to promote positive behaviour and to guard against bullying. Incidents of poor behaviour are recorded and monitored, and there are suitable arrangements, should they be required, for restraining or searching boarders. In response to the questionnaire, a few boarders said that house staff do not treat them fairly. A small minority commented that bullying is not dealt with and that sanctions and rewards are not fairly applied. Inspectors investigated all these points thoroughly, both examining records and talking with pupils, and concluded that staff deal with these aspects fairly and consistently. [NMS 12]
- 3.14 All the latest guidance regarding the safe recruitment of staff is carefully followed, to ensure their suitability to work with children; the requirements to record the details in a single central register are met. All those over the age of 16 who are not employed by the school but live on school premises have been subject to appropriate vetting checks and have signed an agreement regarding their use of their accommodation, any contact they may have with the boarders and the supervision of their visitors. There is appropriate supervision of all visitors to the boarding house to ensure that they have no unauthorised access to the boarders or their accommodation. The school does not make arrangements for the appointment of guardians for any of its boarders. [NMS 14]

3.(c) Leadership and management of the boarding provision

- 3.15 The school meets all of the NMS under this section.
- 3.16 A clear statement of the principles and practice of boarding is readily available to parents on the website, and provided for boarders and staff. It was seen accurately to reflect current practice. [NMS 1]
- 3.17 The structure for boarding leadership has recently changed. It complies with the requirements, but roles and line management are not developed consistently across all houses. Boarding staff are experienced, but boarding training is, in some cases, not fully developed. Boarding and academic staff communicate appropriately. All necessary records are suitably monitored and maintained, with appropriate action taken when relevant. This includes the monitoring of risk assessments, in response to action required following the previous inspection. A few boarders feel that staff do not check whether they have the right amount of work. Records show that work, too, is suitably monitored. [NMS 13]
- 3.18 All employees or volunteers who work with the boarders are given induction training and have job descriptions. Staff undergo regular appraisals, meeting requirements, but these lack rigour because the targets given are mostly not measurable, and not focused on increasing effectiveness, for example through boarding-specific training. The school makes clear, in writing, the roles of spouses, partners and other adult members of staff households in boarding. Sufficient staff are deployed to supervise boarders outside teaching time. Regular roll calls and record keeping enable staff to know where each boarder is at all times. The policy for missing boarders is understood by staff, including the need to work with emergency services when necessary. House notice boards display duty staff names, and which member of staff boarders can contact in the night. In response to action required following the previous inspection, the arrangements for contacting a member of staff at night are now satisfactory. All staff are suitably experienced or qualified. Adults sleep in the boarding house and within the complex of sixth-form lodges each night. Staff facilities are entirely separate from those for the boarders. Boarders rarely visit any staff accommodation, and when they do the visit is carefully supervised. [NMS 15]
- 3.19 The boarders do not encounter discrimination for any reason. Care is taken to cater for the needs of every individual, including those with EAL or SEND. [NMS 16]
- 3.20 In response to the questionnaire, a minority of boarders indicated that their opinions are not asked for or responded to. Inspectors found that there are sufficient formal and informal structures in place for boarders to make their views known. Boarders are able to contribute their views to suggest improvements both informally and formally through their head of house in house meetings. No boarder is penalised for raising a concern in good faith. [NMS 17]
- 3.21 In response to any parents' complaints, the school follows an appropriate written complaints procedure that meets all requirements. [NMS 18]
- 3.22 School prefects have no specific responsibilities within the boarding house, but those prefects who are also boarders act as role models and as a conduit for information to be passed from pupils to staff. Heads of house are chosen to act in leading roles in the houses. They have a clear job description and suitable training to ensure that there is no abuse of the role. [NMS 19]
- 3.23 The school does not arrange lodgings for boarders. [NMS 20]