



# **INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE**

**ABBOTSHOLME SCHOOL  
STANDARD INSPECTION**

# INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

## Abbotsholme School

Full Name of School	<b>Abbotsholme School</b>		
DfE Number	<b>830/6005</b>		
Registered Charity Number	<b>528612</b>		
Address	<b>Abbotsholme School Rocester Uttoxeter Staffordshire ST14 5BS</b>		
Telephone Number	<b>01889 590217</b>		
Fax Number	<b>01889 591001</b>		
Email Address	<b>stevefairclough@abbotsholme.co.uk</b>		
Headmaster	<b>Mr Steve Fairclough</b>		
Chair of Governors	<b>Mr Mark Wells</b>		
Age Range	<b>4 to 18</b>		
Total Number of Pupils	<b>317</b>		
Gender of Pupils	<b>Mixed (200 boys; 117 girls;)</b>		
Numbers by Age	0-2 (EYFS):	5-11:	<b>46</b>
	3-5 (EYFS):	11-18:	<b>270</b>
Number of Day Pupils	Total:	<b>185</b>	Capacity for flexi-boarding: <b>Yes</b>
Number of Boarders	Total:	<b>132</b>	
	Full:	<b>53</b>	Weekly: <b>79</b>
EYFS Gender	<b>Mixed</b>		
Inspection dates	<b>05 Apr 2011 to 06 Apr 2011 11 May 2011 to 13 May 2011</b>		

## PREFACE

This inspection report follows the STANDARD *ISI schedule*. The inspection consists of two parts: an INITIAL two-day inspection of regulatory requirements followed by a three-day FINAL (team) inspection of the school's broader educational provision. The previous ISI inspection was in May 2007.

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is the body approved by the Government for the purpose of inspecting schools belonging to the Independent Schools Council (ISC) Associations and reporting on compliance with the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010\*. The range of these Regulations is as follows.

- (a) Quality of education provided (curriculum)
- (b) Quality of education provided (teaching)
- (c) Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils
- (d) Welfare, health and safety of pupils
- (e) Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors
- (f) Premises and accommodation
- (g) Provision of information
- (h) Manner in which complaints are to be handled

\*These Standards Regulations replace those first introduced on 1 September 2003.

Legislation additional to Part 3, Welfare, health and safety of pupils, is as follows.

- (i) The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA).
- (ii) Race, gender and sexual discrimination legislation.
- (iii) Corporal punishment.

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

ISI is also approved to inspect the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), which was introduced in September 2008 and applies to all children in England from birth to 31<sup>st</sup> August following their fifth birthday. This report evaluates the extent to which the setting fulfils the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework published by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and follows the requirements of the Childcare Act 2006 as subsequently amended.

Under the Care Standards Act 2000, an inspection of boarding was carried out at the same time by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), Children's Services and Skills. The report of this inspection is available separately at [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk) under Children's social care/Boarding school.

The inspection of the school is from an educational perspective and provides limited inspection of other aspects, though inspectors will 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.

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## **1. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL**

- 1.1 Abbotsholme was founded as a boys' boarding school in 1889 by Dr Cecil Reddie, with a strong focus on personal development, relationships with others, and learning by doing as well as by academic study. This vision is retained in the aims of the present school, now a co-educational boarding and day school for pupils from the ages of four to eighteen. It aims to provide a holistic education, with opportunities for balanced academic, personal and social development. It emphasises 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 promotes resilience and self-confidence, and a very wide range of outdoor pursuits is provided to foster such attributes. Through its membership of the Round Square organisation, it encourages students to tour abroad and engage in community service. The school occupies 140 acres beside the River Dove. There is a working farm, in which the pupils are involved, and an equestrian centre. The school is overseen by a board of governors, which confers with a consultative council.
- 1.2 At the time of the inspection 317 pupils were attending the school, 117 girls and 200 boys. Of these, 132 were boarders: 53 full boarders and, 79 weekly boarders. The junior department had 47 pupils, with just one pupil in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). There were 199 pupils aged 11-16 and 71 in the sixth form. Standardised tests indicate that the average ability of pupils in the school up to Year 11 is broadly in line with the national average, with a wide range of abilities evident. In the sixth form it is below the national average.
- 1.3 Enrolment is dependent upon an assessment comprising an interview, and usually tests, to ensure that the pupil can profit from the curriculum offered. The school has just begun to offer education in the EYFS. Direct entry to the sixth form is normally dependent on GCSE results. Day pupils come from a radius of about 20 miles; boarders come from far afield, including overseas. There are 22 pupils who receive support for English as an additional language (EAL). The school has identified 134 pupils as having specific learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD), usually dyslexia, of whom 109 receive additional tuition. One pupil has a statement of special educational need.
- 1.4 Since the last inspection the school has developed a new library and outdoor centre and developed further the curriculum and pastoral care. At the time of the inspection a senior leader with responsibility for teaching was in the process of assuming that position and the appointment of a head of junior school was imminent.
- 1.5 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school.

## **2. THE SUCCESS OF THE SCHOOL**

### **2.(a) Main findings**

- 2.1 Abbotsholme is exceptionally successful in achieving its aims. Pupils are empowered to find success, often in wide ranging areas of experience, and sometimes despite the difficulties they have with aspects of learning. Achievement is excellent. There is outstanding achievement in the wider curriculum, which provides a wealth of opportunities in adventurous and sporting activities and on the school farm. Many pupils discover in themselves strengths of character in tackling the challenges of the wider curriculum. Academic achievement is good and there is plenty of opportunity for pupils of all abilities to do well. Teaching is good overall. Some is excellent, but occasionally lessons are less successful. The school is seeking to improve teaching further.
- 2.2 The pupils' personal development is exemplary. Pupils embrace wholeheartedly the school's aspirations of courage, honesty, humility, integrity and respect. They manage themselves well, facing each day with enthusiasm, optimism and hope. They learn how to look after themselves and one another. They are not disconcerted by failure. Their approach to life in the school community, and more widely, reflects the mantra of the school's founder: 'Glad day – love and duty'. Day pupils and boarders respond exceptionally well to the school's excellent pastoral care.
- 2.3 Excellent governance gives firm foundation to the school's ethos and high quality of provision. Excellent leadership brings unfailing inspiration to the daily life of the school. The school knows itself: strengths and areas for development are clearly identified in the school's plans for ongoing improvement. The recommendations of the previous inspection have been addressed effectively. The school is well managed and is taking steps to refine the management of some aspects of its work. Links with parents are outstanding. Parents and pupils speak in the strongest terms of the school's leadership. They are full of praise for the unstinting care, support and encouragement that is the essence of the school. The inspectors concur with the parents' views. Abbotsholme is well placed for the future as it continues to uphold the aims of its founder.

## **2.(b) Action points**

### **(i) Compliance with regulatory requirements**

(The range of the Independent School Standards Regulations is given in the Preface)

- 2.4 At the time of the initial visit, the school met all the requirements of the Independent School Standards Regulations 2010.

### **(ii) Recommendations for further improvement**

- 2.5 The school is advised to make the following improvements.

1. 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.
2. Improve the management of the junior division to provide further opportunities for pupils' academic and personal development.
3. Fully implement the EYFS curriculum so that all areas of learning can foster independent thinking, inquiry skills and decision making.
4. Develop the indoor and outdoor EYFS environments to enhance children's learning opportunities and to provide planned, purposeful play and exploration.

### **3. THE QUALITY OF ACADEMIC AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS**

#### **3.(a) The quality of the pupils' achievements and their learning, attitudes and skills**

- 3.1 The pupils' overall achievement is excellent. They achieve exceptionally well across many areas of academic and personal development. In accordance with the school's aims, they gain a good academic base from which to understand the world and contribute positively to it. Many pupils show an impressive willingness to 'have a go' at things, to puzzle things out and to speak their mind cogently and with conviction.
- 3.2 By age eleven, pupils could explain lucidly why the three times table generates diagonal lines in the ten-by-ten number square. In preparation for examinations at age sixteen, pupils could explain how acidity level affects the availability of minerals in the soil to plants and therefore determines crop choices. Sixth-form physics students could give a clear explanation of centripetal force and the failure of drive belts. More able pupils are challenged by teaching that presses for high-quality response – as seen in the first year of the sixth form with insistence on precise nomenclature in organic chemistry: students respond well to such challenge. Oracy, literacy and numeracy are developed to a standard that is generally very good in relation to pupils' ages and the courses they are following. The persistence of younger secondary pupils with underwater swimming was considerable. Tackling overhangs on a replica of one of Europe's most noted 'bouldering' rocks showed considerable ingenuity and determination. The choir graced the Easter service with a rendition of anthems to a professional standard.
- 3.3 Pupils achieve success in debating tournaments, mathematics challenges, national equestrian competitions and speech examinations. There are high levels of achievement in the Duke of Edinburgh's (D of E) Award scheme, with a high success rate at all levels, including gold. Pupils have achieved many awards for sporting and outdoor activities, with successful county level participation in most sports, including cricket at the time of the inspection, and individual national level accomplishment in gymnastics and speed skating. Other achievement includes success in the youth parliament, electric car racing finals, farm-stock judging and in first aid. Pupils have participated in service exchanges to several countries, such as Costa Rica immediately prior to the inspection: pupils gave a multimedia presentation of their prowess in construction work, trekking in a tropical rain forest and free swimming. They are successful in gaining admission to universities with rigorous entry requirements, with some winning sponsorship from international companies.
- 3.4 The pupils' attainment in the junior school cannot be measured in relation to average performance against national tests, but on the evidence from their achievement in lessons, their work it is judged to be high in relation to their age. The following analysis uses the national data for 2008-10. These are the most recent three years for which comparative statistics are available. Results in GCSE have been similar to the national average for maintained schools. Results at A level have been similar to the national average for maintained schools. These levels of attainment (as judged in the junior school), supported by evidence from lessons and the pupils' work, show that pupils make good progress relative to the average for pupils of similar ability. Those pupils with LDD often make exceptional progress academically, in many cases allied to progress that they have made in their personal development.

The school encourages into A-level studies some students who are weaker than would normally be expected.

- 3.5 The pupils' enjoyment of school life is often palpable, particularly in agricultural pursuits and in outdoor and sporting activities. Their exuberance is sometimes contagious. In lessons, pupils are attentive and persevering. They are keen to engage with teachers and, where appropriate, with one another. The wide range of opportunities and coaching enable practically all pupils to find success and a sense of achievement: many say they have grown in confidence and the ability to deal with personal difficulties. Several pupils in the sixth form explained to inspectors that they were 'almost illiterate' on joining the school in the early secondary years, but have largely mastered their difficulties, with determination, and now look with confidence to success at university.

### **3.(b) The contribution of curricular and extra-curricular provision (including community links of benefit to pupils)**

- 3.6 The curriculum makes an outstanding contribution to the pupils' academic achievement and personal development. Its academic and wider ranging components provide exceptionally well for all ages, needs and abilities. It is fundamental to achievement of the school's aim to provide an holistic education, particularly so with regard to pupils' personal development.
- 3.7 In the junior school the curriculum broadly follows the National Curriculum. Specialist teaching in languages, physical education (PE), music, life and art enhances provision. Creative, expressive and practical subjects have a strong place in the curriculum. Excellent programmes of personal, social and health education (PSHE) for all ages promote the pupils' excellent personal development in many areas. Curricular links between the junior and senior school are good and preparation for the next stage of education is well managed. Older pupils use some of the facilities in the senior school. There is excellent provision for pupils with LDD through individual and small group lessons. Extra-curricular clubs are popular with pupils and the extensive programme of trips, such as to a science park and history trips to local museums and art galleries, bolster the pupils' learning. A full programme of outdoor activities including visits, field work and visiting speakers, extends and enriches the pupils' experience and are fully integrated into the curriculum. All pupils have horse riding lessons and access to the farm and estate. Whilst the curriculum and organisation of the junior school enable pupils to make good progress, there is at present some lack of clarity of overall direction from one classroom to another. Resulting from this, there are occasionally insufficient opportunities to maximise pupils' academic and personal development.
- 3.8 The senior school offers a wide range of academic subjects, supported by a very extensive commitment to outdoor education. Setting in the core subjects facilitates the matching of work to the pupils' needs. Options at GCSE include two main languages, with German for some, the possibility of separate sciences, business studies and an agricultural course. The rich sixth-form curriculum supports the aptitudes and aspirations of the pupils, whilst maintaining a wide range of A-level options alongside vocational courses in sport, agriculture, equine studies, Young Enterprise and outdoor leadership. The school goes to considerable lengths to ensure GCSE options and A-level choices are designed around the needs of pupils.
- 3.9 Throughout the senior school, the music and drama programme supports the pupils' aesthetic and creative development. PE is a strong feature and contributes to a

healthy lifestyle. There is an excellent programme for PSHE, including careers. The improved programme in the sixth form, which meets the recommendation of the previous inspection, prepares pupils well for life after school. Formal careers education begins in Year 9, and provides effective guidance for selecting GCSE and A-level options and with higher education applications. Events such as the biennial careers fair and talks by visiting speakers prepare pupils well for the next stage of their education. Improved library provision, recommended at the time of a previous inspection, is of high quality.

- 3.10 Support is highly effective for pupils with LDD or EAL. Staff are well briefed on the support that pupils need. Throughout the school, including the sixth form, there is additional help or extra lesson provision for those who need it. Parents expressed high satisfaction with the provision available, and the progress pupils make.
- 3.11 A diverse and outstanding array of activities is a key strength of the school. Pupils comment that this is one of the main reasons they so enjoy their lives at Abbotsholme. Sport, music and drama provide superb opportunities through which many pupils experience resounding success. The school's outstanding promotion of personal growth, leadership, international awareness and the development of social conscience and responsibility through opportunities offered by its association with Round Square results in pupils' strong appreciation of diversity, the needs of others and the means of 'making a difference'. The richness of the "Expectations" programme develops a variety of life skills and life-long interests. It involves traditional team sports, fencing, farming, dance and climbing. An extensive enrichment programme includes horse riding, conservation, farming, drama, and cookery. A strong Young Enterprise group and a sixth-form debating forum give intensive opportunities for students to hone presentation skills. In a sixth-form debate, protagonists entertained the audience with well judged humour and responded quickly to challenges. All pupils in Year 9 embark on the D of E Award scheme and the majority achieve success. Hikes and camps, are a regular feature of the school's calendar, and foster a strong sense of community. Expeditions further afield have included an ecological trip to Costa Rica and a visit to Valencia.
- 3.12 Community links are strong, and fostered through a range of charity work. Pupils visit the elderly and work in various local and international community-based projects such as in Thailand. The fundraising committee, run by sixth-formers, organises fund-raising events through which considerable sums of money are raised for charities at home and abroad. The international committee, again run by older pupils, develops links with exchange students from different countries including South Africa, India and Australia, who quickly become part of the Abbotsholme community.

### **3.(c) The contribution of teaching**

- 3.13 Teaching makes a good contribution to the pupils' academic achievement and some teaching is excellent. It enables pupils to learn with commitment and often with enthusiasm.
- 3.14 Teachers have good knowledge of pupils and a clear awareness of how well they are doing and where they have difficulties. This is particularly so in the support of pupils with LDD, where teaching pinpoints precisely the things that individuals respond to well and those that can prove challenging for them. This enables these pupils to address their learning difficulties highly effectively. Throughout the school, praise and encouragement are used very well. All pupils feel that they are valued and that their teachers have a very steadfast commitment to help them, which promotes effort. They take pride in their work, although presentation can be variable in quality. Behaviour and attitudes in lessons are excellent.
- 3.15 Much teaching engages pupils extremely well and provides exciting opportunities and a high degree of challenge. Most teaching demonstrates very good subject knowledge. Points are explained lucidly and teaching often uses carefully selected resources, sometimes including ICT. The best lessons are well planned with good variety of activities and allow sufficient time for pupils to try things out for themselves. In such lessons, pace is often brisk and expectations are generally high. Some teaching encourages dialogue, enabling pupils to frame ideas co-operatively as they make points in discussion. In some lessons with older pupils there is lively interchange between teachers and pupils, though occasionally particular individuals can dominate. Though many pupils can be bold, a few hesitate to take risks in expressing themselves where they are unsure of their ground, and teachers sometimes do not do enough to draw them into discussion.
- 3.16 Teaching sets many writing tasks that promote expansive and independent thought. High ability pupils are given good opportunities to realise their potential. In mathematics, GCSE pupils could explain clearly why some quadratic equations have no real-number roots in response to challenging questioning, whilst sixth-form students could choose discerningly between alternative strategies for solving mechanics problems. This indicates effective teaching.
- 3.17 A few lessons lack imaginative planning, with too much talking by the teacher, and some are insufficiently demanding. Occasionally, in groups where there was a wide range of ability, teaching was very attentive to the needs of the less able but, as a result, the progress of more able pupils was stalled as they waited for the lesson to move on. Teachers do not always use their very good knowledge of pupils and their needs to best advantage in planning lessons. Not all lessons end neatly with a clear resume of learning points.
- 3.18 Much marking is very good and has addressed the concerns of the previous inspection. Comments are generally encouraging, recognise strengths and improvement in pupils' work. The pupils' work sometimes shows clear progress in response to suggestions in earlier marking. Some marking is less detailed.

## **4. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT**

### **4.(a) The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils**

- 4.1 The pupils' personal development is outstanding. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils was seen as a strength at the last inspection and the school has continued to build on this strength. The school continues to meet fully its aim to develop resourceful, resilient and confident young people, who demonstrate kindness to each other and a strong spirit of adventure, not least through an exceptional outdoor education and extra-curricular provision.
- 4.2 Chapel provides excellent opportunities to reflect on the school's values in a largely Christian, non-denominational setting, to which pupils respond with ready acceptance. Pupils presented an excellent report of their recent visit to Costa Rica, where they had visited an eco-friendly and sustainable community. Pupils listened attentively and were warm and generous in their appreciation of the presentation, demonstrating a strong sense of community and belonging. Pupils' bearing at an Eastertide service left no doubt that they were gathered in a sense of awe that countless generations have found the means of hope and assurance in the Easter message.
- 4.3 Pupils consistently demonstrate a strong moral awareness. Excellent religious studies and 'Life programmes', encourage pupils to reflect on the importance of individual choices and the consequences of their actions. The sixth-form tutorial programme enables pupils to understand the world around them and to make an important contribution to it, with carefully considered choices and well founded judgements, for instance about career choices.
- 4.4 The pupils' social development is excellent. They are friendly and welcoming, proud of their school and supportive of each other. Strong social skills are demonstrated in all aspects of school life. Senior pupils readily accept many opportunities to take responsibility as prefects and heads of houses. A 'buddy' system pairs each junior school child with a senior school partner; this is welcomed by parents and has been highly effective. Outdoor leadership and expedition-leader awards, wide participation in the D of E Award scheme, opportunities for pupils to be dependable on the farm and to help with lambing, all serve to promote a strong sense of the individuals' responsibility to the whole. This is furthered through the extensive range of weekend and holiday activities, in which pupils often take leadership roles. It was encouraging to see sixth formers supporting a Year 7 PE lesson, to mutual benefit. Pupils have a clear awareness of how wider society functions and the locus of public services.
- 4.5 The pupils' understanding of other religions and cultures is strong, promoted by visits to diverse places of worship, which develop a strong awareness of the value and contributions of other traditions. The school is a multi-cultural community with, for example, opportunities to learn about Chinese New Year by joining in celebrations. All pupils from ages seven to sixteen follow a 'Religion and Life' course, a strength of the school, which is very well structured and resourced. Excellent teaching is supported by guest speakers who draw on experience and speak with conviction, or run workshops that stimulate and challenge pupils and broaden their horizons, for example, about the nature and variety of religious experience. Art and music make significant contributions to developing an understanding and appreciation of other cultures.

#### **4.(b) The contribution of arrangements for welfare, health and safety**

- 4.6 Excellent pastoral support and guidance provided at all levels throughout the school and effective arrangements to ensure the pupils' welfare, health and safety support their personal development highly effectively. Parents expressed their appreciation of this care and, in particular, the encouragement given to young people to find success. Pupils value the support and guidance given to them by their teachers, many of whom give generously of their time by making themselves available for additional support, either through formally arranged revision workshops, or for informal academic, emotional or pastoral support. Pupils know that their welfare is central, not only to respected medical staff, but also to a caring team of teachers, all of whom know individual pupils very well.
- 4.7 Relationships between staff and pupils and amongst the pupils themselves are warm and strong. Pupils feel very well cared for and respected. Older pupils readily take opportunities to help younger pupils.
- 4.8 Safeguarding arrangements are effective and the school is diligent in ensuring that adults in the school have been appropriately checked before working with children. Staff are appropriately trained in child protection with the required frequency. There are child protection officers and a governor with that brief. The child protection policy is reviewed annually, meeting the requirement of the previous inspection. Risks from fire and other hazards are properly addressed. There is good provision for pupils who are unwell and for the administration of medication. The school has an appropriate plan to meet the needs of those with physical or learning needs. A healthy and balanced diet is provided and catering provision meets with relevant regulations. Pupils enjoy the food that the school provides and there are opportunities for them to bring concerns about food to the attention of the school, which in turn is responsive. Admission and attendance registers and their administration are effective and absence is followed up thoroughly. The school has good risk assessment systems for all areas of its activities, including the often novel and enterprising outdoor activities. There are comprehensive behaviour and anti-bullying policies, but incidents of poor behaviour are rare. The school's promotion of physical and adventurous activities is excellent and this further develops an awareness of health and safety and encourages pupils to think about levels of acceptable risk, and to take responsibility for their own and other peoples' welfare and well-being.

#### **4.(c) The quality of boarding education**

- 4.9 An inspection of boarding was carried out by Ofsted at the same time as this inspection. That inspection is reported separately. The ISI inspection considered boarding in the whole school context only.
- 4.10 The boarding experience plays a valuable part in the pupils' education and personal development, and makes an excellent contribution to the achievement of the school's aims. The school provides informative and well structured handbooks for boarders and their parents. Medical and boarding staff deal extremely well with medical issues. An independent listener is available for the boarders. Boarders feel happy in approaching any of their house staff, safe in the knowledge that issues will be dealt with swiftly and sensitively.
- 4.11 The boarding accommodation is wholesome and comfortable with personalised space and appropriate social areas for relaxation. Social areas are well equipped

with a television, a pool table, table-football or other games, and there are suitably equipped kitchens where snacks and breakfast can be made. Pupils take a pride in their surroundings and keep them neat and tidy. The cabins in Barnfield each provide accommodation for small numbers of older pupils, who are able to experience a real sense of independent living. This is greatly appreciated by the senior boarders. The units are bright, clean and well equipped.

- 4.12 The boarders enjoy their after-school and weekend activities and these contribute well to their social and cultural development. Special weekend trips for the full boarders are welcomed and appreciated. Boys and girls mix well at breakfast, dinner and in their own free time.
- 4.13 The boarders have very good relationships with one another. They enjoy their fruitful contact with day pupils in lessons, activities and house events. The boarding committee is actively engaged in broadening the boarders' recreational activities. During their regular meetings, the house parents listen attentively to the thoughts and ideas of the boarders, acting on their behalf wherever possible. The relationships between house staff and boarders are strong, and pupils value the support of the staff and the efforts they make to create a secure and happy environment in the houses. They are a well organised, caring and experienced team who provide excellent opportunities for the pastoral and academic development of the boarders.

## **5. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

### **5.(a) The quality of governance**

- 5.1 Excellent governance upholds the educational vision of the school's founder assiduously. It supports the pupils' excellent academic achievement and outstanding personal development. Governors are tireless in doing all that might be called for to facilitate high-quality education. Many have a strong personal association with the school as former pupils or parents. All have a clear insight into the workings of the school and they are vigilant in their monitoring role; many are frequent visitors to the school. There is close communication between governors and the school's senior staff on matters of finance and policy. Governors are well briefed by detailed reports from the school on these things and they undertake a very thorough analysis of the school's financial position.
- 5.2 The governing body has been adroit in its attention to regulatory requirements. Responsibilities for child protection, welfare and health and safety are addressed with due diligence. Governors are astute in ensuring the school's financial security and in seeking best value for the maintenance and development of facilities and educational provision. The governing body's procedures, and the input of associated consultative committees, are highly effective.

### **5.(b) The quality of leadership and management**

- 5.3 Leadership and management are excellent overall, and the school is currently refining the management of some aspects of its work.
- 5.4 Leadership is incisive and ambitious in driving forward continuing improvement. There is determined and perceptive educational direction that sustains the school's ethos and gives clarity of purpose to provision for pupils' education and their personal development. The unflagging commitment demonstrated by the headmaster and his senior team brings out the best efforts of the school community. The senior team is loyally supported by the staff. Parents and pupils are highly supportive of the school; some extol the school's leadership in the most fulsome terms. Self-evaluation is shrewd and leaders have a clear and convincing picture of how things stand. Developments have been put in hand with careful consideration of priorities and thorough evaluation of the impact of change. There are clear plans for ongoing development, particularly with regard to the 'chain of command' in leadership of the growing junior school, and its developing EYFS provision. There is constant vigilance with regard to plans for the maintenance of the school's extensive buildings and site. The strong leadership identified at the last inspection is robustly established.
- 5.5 The day-to-day management of the school is effective and the school's routines run efficiently. Responsibilities are appropriately delegated. The recommendations of the last inspection have been tackled well. There are clear lines of responsibility with regard to the safeguarding of pupils. There are thorough arrangements for the checking of the suitability of staff, governors and others who come into contact with pupils. The school is effective in recruiting and retaining suitable staff and they are appropriately trained in safeguarding matters. The school is well managed.
- 5.6 The school is giving increasing attention to the management of teaching quality. In the junior part of the school, pupils make good progress overall, though it can

sometimes be uneven and occasionally opportunities are underdeveloped. The school is in the process of establishing more coherent management of that area of its work and the appointment of a head of junior school is imminent.

### **5.(c) The quality of links with parents, carers and guardians**

- 5.7 Links with the parent body are outstanding. The school has a close and highly effective relationship with parents and guardians, which is totally in accordance with its aims and ethos. Parents are extremely pleased with the progress that pupils make, the pastoral care, and the promotion of the worthwhile values that are evident in the school's ethos and lived daily by its pupils. They comment on the encouragement that enables pupils to achieve.
- 5.8 Parents appreciate the well structured and informative handbooks that are provided. Weekly newsletters are posted on the comprehensive and well presented website, and distributed by a very efficient email system that parents welcome. All required information, including policies and procedures, is posted on the website. The parents of boarders are kept well informed. The prospectus is attractive and clear. The annual Abbotsholmian presents a lively celebration of highlights of the year.
- 5.9 Parents receive full reports each term, half-termly effort grades and, for seniors, attainment grades with tutors' comments. Full reports comment on each subject and set targets. Reports give specific and helpful information on the pupils' attitudes, progress and their contribution to school life. Target-setting is valued by parents and pupils. Parents are delighted with the transparency surrounding their child's education and welcome the daily contact with the school and the constant dialogue with staff who they feel genuinely know their children. Parents are greatly impressed that good contact is maintained by senior staff throughout the holiday period should a child require extra help with their academic studies.
- 5.10 The parents' association, actively supported by members of the school's leadership team, is thriving. It has many dedicated parents within its midst. Besides initiating a plethora of whole-school fund-raising events, it serves as a link between parents and the school and as a forum to address any issues that may be arising within the parent body. It meets regularly with the headmaster, and is thought a most valuable organisation by both parents and staff, bringing much to the life of the school.
- 5.11 There have been no formal complaints in recent years, but there is a well-structured formal complaints procedure. Parental concerns are generally dealt with informally through direct contact with parents. Any complaints that are raised receive detailed and sensitive treatment. Parents commented on the speedy responses they receive from the headmaster and all staff, who abide by the policy of replying to parental communications within 24 hours.

**What the school should do to improve is given at the beginning of the report in section 2.**

## **6. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE**

### **6.(a) The overall effectiveness of the early years provision – how well the school meets the needs of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage**

6.1 Provision for the children in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) in school is good. The school is successful in its aim to introduce pupils into the Abbotsholme ethos, establishing self-confidence and self-respect in a nurturing and caring environment. A strength of the provision is the welcoming atmosphere which the staff create and in which all children are equally well cared for. The EYFS is a very recent introduction to Abbotsholme School and is therefore still in the earliest stages of implementation. There are plans to develop all areas of the provision to meet fully the EYFS requirements: at present some areas of the provision are better established than others. Teachers manage the children's behaviour well and provide a secure emotional environment. Teaching takes into account the children's ability and recognises different levels of maturity. Adults and children are quick to acknowledge achievements and share success spontaneously. Currently the setting is less successful in implementing the EYFS curriculum to enable children to become independent, critical thinkers who can apply themselves to practical problem solving and creative development.

### **6.(b) The effectiveness of the leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage**

6.2 Safeguarding procedures are excellent, the required checks have been carried out and appropriate risk assessments and safeguarding procedures are in place. Adults work well with parents to meet the diverse needs of the children. Parents feel well supported and are confident that their child is making progress. Staff are working hard to implement fully the EYFS curriculum, to develop systems for self-evaluation and assessment and to identify clear priorities for improvement. Teachers' planning is being reviewed to provide a coordinated range of learning opportunities. Policies and planning for the early years curriculum are being developed, which will foster children's interests and result in a more effective balance of adult-led and child-initiated activities, thus informing future learning objectives. Good practice ensures that children's individual contribution is recognised and celebrated. The beautiful and extensive grounds provide a unique resource, they are enjoyed and appreciated, and are key features of future planning for the early years' curriculum. The classroom resources are well used, although many of them rely on adult intervention and there are not enough opportunities to develop independent creativity, through, for instance, role play or problem-solving activities.

### **6.(c) The quality of the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage**

6.3 The provision is good. Children are sensitively supported by the adults in the setting. Teaching recognises the children's different abilities and maturity and tasks are differentiated to reflect this, but the teaching does not sufficiently challenge the children or actively engage them in their own learning. At present, the organisation of the setting does not make it possible for the children to have daily access to an outdoor extension of the classroom, which compromises opportunities for physical development, creative play and independent learning. Keeping children safe, and

promoting health and well being, make a strong contribution to welfare of the children in the setting.

#### **6.(d) Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage**

- 6.4 The children's behaviour is exemplary; they try hard to please their teachers and learn quickly. They can focus on a task; when the teaching matches their needs they respond with enthusiasm. They co-operate with one another and the older pupils in the setting are gentle and caring with the younger children. The children's social and communication skills are good, they are keen to contribute their ideas, they express a growing knowledge of the world, they are able to count and use numbers for different purposes. They investigate, problem-solve and develop their own theories less frequently. Children understand about healthy eating and have good hygiene practices. They feel safe and valued in a very positive spirit of community.

**Section 2 includes what the Early Years Foundation Stage should do to improve its provision**

## INSPECTION EVIDENCE

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

The National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools were inspected by a team of 3 Ofsted inspectors over 3 days.

### Inspectors

Mr Jim Bennetts	Reporting Inspector
Mrs Zelma Braganza	Former Head, GSA school
Miss Eleni Conidaris	Housemistress, HMC school
Mr Michael Goodwin	Headteacher, SHMIS school
Mr David Goulbourn	Head of Junior School, SHMIS school
Mr Alec Synge	Former headmaster, IAPS school
Mrs Catherine Lane	EYFS Coordinating inspector (Former Headteacher, IAPS school)