



**ISI** Independent  
Schools  
Inspectorate

**Focused Compliance and Educational Quality Inspection Report**

**Abingdon Preparatory School**

**May 2023**

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## School's Details

<b>School College</b>	Abingdon Preparatory School		
<b>DfE number</b>	931/6095		
<b>Registered charity number</b>	1071298		
<b>Address</b>	Abingdon Preparatory School Josca's House Kingston Road Abingdon Oxfordshire OX13 5NX		
<b>Telephone number</b>	01865 391570		
<b>Email address</b>	school.sec@abingdonprep.org.uk		
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Craig Williams		
<b>Chair of governors</b>	Mr Michael Stevens		
<b>Proprietor</b>	Abingdon School		
<b>Age range</b>	4 to 13		
<b>Number of pupils on roll</b>	219		
	<b>EYFS</b>	12	
	<b>Juniors</b>	129	<b>Seniors</b> 78
<b>Inspection dates</b>	10 to 12 May 2023		

## **1. Background Information**

### **About the school**

- 1.1 Abingdon Preparatory School is an independent day school for male pupils. Founded in 1956 as Josca's, since 1998 it has been part of the Abingdon Foundation, a charitable trust administered by a governing body.
- 1.2 The school is comprised of four sections: the pre-prep section, for pupils in Reception to Year 2; the junior section, for pupils in Year 3 to Year 4; the middle section, for pupils in Year 5 to Year 6; and the senior section, for pupils in Year 7 to Year 8.

### **What the school seeks to do**

- 1.3 The school aims to provide a nurturing and supportive environment where pupils can discover their talents and fulfil their potential. This includes encouraging kindness, compassion, tolerance, respect and a sense of responsibility to themselves and others built on the Christian tradition of the Abingdon Foundation. The objective is to develop confident, polite, well-rounded pupils with the intellectual curiosity and suitable skills for the next phase of their life.

### **About the pupils**

- 1.4 Pupils come from families with a range of professional and business backgrounds, mostly living within a 20-mile radius of the school. Standardised test data provided by the school indicate that the ability of the pupils is above average when compared to pupils taking the same tests nationally. The school has identified 33 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), which include dyslexia, dyspraxia, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and processing difficulties, 31 of whom receive additional support. No pupil in the school has an education, health and care (EHC) plan. English is an additional language for 29 pupils, four of whom require additional support. The curriculum is modified for pupils whom the school has identified as the most able in its population.

## 2. Regulatory Compliance Inspection

### Preface

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is approved by the Secretary of State to inspect schools which are, or whose heads are, in membership of the associations which form the Independent Schools Council (ISC) and report on the extent to which they meet the Independent School Standards ('the standards') in the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014. Inspections of schools with early years settings not requiring registration also report whether the school complies with key provisions of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory framework, and for registered settings the full range of the Early Years Foundation Stage provisions is considered. Additionally, inspections report on the school's accessibility plan under Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996. Inspections also comment on the progress made to meet any compliance action points set out in the school's most recent statutory inspection.

ISI inspections are also carried out under the arrangements of the ISC Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership.

**This is a FOCUSED COMPLIANCE INSPECTION which was combined with an inspection of EDUCATIONAL QUALITY. The FOCUSED COMPLIANCE inspection reports only on the school's compliance with the standards.** The standards represent minimum requirements and judgements are given either as **met** or as **not met**. All schools are required to meet all the standards applicable to them. Where the minimum requirements are not met, this is clearly indicated in the relevant section of the report and the school is required to take the actions specified. In this focused compliance inspection, key standards have been inspected in detail. These are the standards on safeguarding; measures to guard against bullying; arrangements for pupils' health and safety; arrangements to check the suitability of staff; the provision of information; the handling of parents' complaints; and other related aspects of leadership and management. The remaining standards and requirements are deemed to continue to be met unless evidence to the contrary has been found.

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.

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 published reports in this document but will have been considered by the team in reaching its judgements.

Links to the standards and requirements can be found here: [The Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014, Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework](#).

## Key findings

- 2.1 The school meets the standards in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, relevant requirements of the statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage, and associated requirements, and no further action is required as a result of this inspection.**

### **PART 1 – Quality of education provided**

- 2.2 The school's own framework for assessment confirms that teaching enables pupils to make good progress in the context of Part 1 paragraph 3(a).
- 2.3 The curriculum is documented, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work for the pupils and covers the required breadth of material. The teaching enables pupils to make good progress, encompasses effective behaviour management and is supported by suitable resources. A suitable framework for the assessment of pupils' performance is in place.
- 2.4 Pupils receive relationships education in the pre-prep, junior and middle sections of the school and relationships and sex education in the senior section, except in so far as they are lawfully excused. The school has consulted parents and published a written statement of its policy which has regard to the relevant statutory guidance.
- 2.5 The standards relating to the quality of education [paragraphs 1–4] are met.**

### **PART 2 – Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils**

- 2.6 Principles and values are actively promoted which facilitate the personal development of pupils as responsible, tolerant, law-abiding citizens.
- 2.7 The standard relating to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development [paragraph 5] is met.**

### **PART 3 – Welfare, health and safety of pupils**

- 2.8 Arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils by means that pay due regard to current statutory guidance; good behaviour is promoted; bullying is prevented so far as reasonably practicable; health and safety requirements are met, including those relating to fire safety; provision is made for first aid. Pupils are properly supervised; admission and attendance registers are maintained, as required, and there is a strategic approach to risk assessment. A disability access plan is in place.
- 2.9 The standards relating to welfare, health and safety [paragraphs 6–16], the requirement of Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010, and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996 are met.**

### **PART 4 – Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors**

- 2.10 The school makes appropriate checks to ensure the suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors, and a register is kept as required.
- 2.11 The standards relating to the suitability of those in contact with pupils at the school [paragraphs 17–21] are met.**

### **PART 5 – Premises of and accommodation at schools**

- 2.12 Suitable toilet and changing facilities, and appropriate accommodation for pupils' medical and therapy needs are provided. The premises are maintained to a standard commensurate with health and safety;

acoustics and lighting are appropriate; water provision is adequate. Suitable outdoor space is provided for physical education and outdoor play.

**2.13 The standards relating to the premises and accommodation [paragraphs 22–31] are met.**

## **PART 6 – Provision of information**

2.14 A range of information is published, provided or made available to parents, inspectors and the Department for Education. This includes details about the proprietor, the ethos of the school and the curriculum, and of the school's arrangements for admission, behaviour and exclusions, bullying, health and safety, first aid, details of the complaints procedure, and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year, and the provision for any with education, health and care plans or English as an additional language. It also includes particulars of the school's academic performance during the preceding school year, inspection reports and (for parents only) a report at least annually of their own child's progress. The safeguarding policy is posted on the school's website.

**2.15 The standard relating to the provision of information [paragraph 32] is met.**

## **PART 7 – Manner in which complaints are handled**

2.16 Parental complaints, if any, are handled effectively through a three-stage process, (informal, formal and a hearing before a panel of three, one of whom is independent of the school). Each stage has clear time scales, and at the third stage the panel can make findings and recommendations which are communicated to the complainant. Records are kept appropriately, including of any action taken, whether or not a complaint is successful.

**2.17 The standard relating to the handling of complaints [paragraph 33] is met.**

## **PART 8 – Quality of leadership in and management of schools**

2.18 The proprietor ensures that the leadership and management demonstrate good skills and knowledge, and fulfil their responsibilities effectively, so that the other standards are consistently met, and they actively promote the well-being of the pupils.

**2.19 The standard relating to leadership and management of the school [paragraph 34] is met.**

### 3. Educational Quality Inspection

#### Preface

The **EDUCATIONAL QUALITY** inspection reports 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.

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

Where necessary, National Curriculum nomenclature is used to refer to year groups in the school.

#### Key findings

3.1 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.

- Pupils develop excellent communication skills over their time in the school.
- Pupils are highly numerate and successfully apply their mathematical skills across a wide range of subjects.
- Pupils develop notably strong study skills across a range of subjects.
- Pupils' achievements beyond the classroom are excellent.

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

- Pupils have a well-developed sense of self and their understanding of how to improve their learning is extremely strong.
- Pupils highly appreciate the non-material aspects of life, and they develop an excellent spiritual understanding.
- Pupils have a clear understanding of right and wrong, which results in excellent behaviour.
- From an early age, pupils develop particularly effective collaborative skills.
- Pupils have an excellent understanding of the different cultures within their school and develop a mature respect for diversity.

#### Recommendation

3.3 The school is advised to make the following improvement.

- Enable senior pupils to build upon their excellent information and communication technology (ICT) skills to develop a greater sense of personal management and ownership of their learning, in and beyond the classroom.

#### The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements

3.4 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.

3.5 The school successfully fulfils its aim to provide a nurturing and supportive environment where pupils can discover their talents and fulfil their potential. In their responses to the pre-inspection questionnaires, almost all parents agreed that teaching helps their child to make good progress and equips them with the collaborative and research skills they need in later life.



- 3.6 Pupils' excellent levels of academic achievement are a result of consistently high expectations on the part of senior leaders and teachers. Pupils' performance in entrance examinations to the foundation's senior school and other independent schools with competitive entry requirements is excellent. Pupils are regularly awarded a third of the academic scholarships available at the foundation's senior school. Governors place a clear priority on the quality of teaching and learning and their regular reviews have a positive impact on pupils' outcomes. Effective use of tracking and monitoring procedures enable teachers and leaders to accurately analyse the performance of cohorts and individual pupils. This informs decisions leading to effective interventions to support and stretch pupils where appropriate. By the end of Reception, every child in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) achieves a good level of development. The school's own assessments show that pupils' progress over their time in the school is at a level which at least fulfils their considerable potential and often exceeds it. All pupils, including those with SEND, EAL and the most able, make equally strong progress.
- 3.7 Pupils make excellent progress in the development of their knowledge, skills and understanding across the range of subjects. Their rapid acquisition of knowledge and retrieval of previous learning are excellent and impact significantly on their progress and attainment. Pupils in Year 2 exhibited literacy skills beyond their age-expected levels as they identified the words which influence the success of persuasive text. Pupils in Year 4 demonstrated excellent knowledge and understanding when editing and suggesting improvements to peers' work, focusing on choice of vocabulary, use of adverbs and a variety of sentence starters. In Year 8, pupils clearly explained Wegener's theory of continental drift and Pangaea by explaining how continents appear to have fitted together. They drew upon evidence of coal seams, rock types, magnetic fields and fossils appearing in different continents.
- 3.8 From the youngest age, pupils are notably articulate and apply their speaking skills confidently when talking to adults and their peers. Reception children exhibited highly confident oral skills when delivering presentations on chosen countries. Pupils increasingly show respect for others' opinions whilst arguing their own viewpoints cogently. In Year 4, they debated whether competitive sports should be banned in schools or not, and demonstrated excellent creative writing skills when considering how to catch *the Iron Man*. Pupils in Year 7 imaginatively wrote monologues for characters in *Hangman*. Pupils' reading skills develop rapidly throughout their time in the school. In Year 2, they demonstrated this when reading eloquently from the class whiteboard about African animals. Pupils in Year 6 read extremely well when they identified and analysed character types from a text, for example, protagonist and antagonist.
- 3.9 Pupils are highly numerate and demonstrate a mastery of mathematical skills above age-related expectations at all stages of their learning. In Reception, children use these skills when weighing and measuring whilst baking, and in Years 1 and 2, pupils effectively use timelines in history. In science, pupils measured growth when considering Jack's beanstalk, and measured distances to ensure the elves travelled as quickly as possible along a zipwire to help Santa Claus. In English, pupils drew upon their fascination of arithmetical facts to express the number of times per second a hummingbird flaps its wings. Pupils in the middle and senior sections of the school apply their numeracy skills effectively to create pie charts and bar graphs and use percentages to analyse data in geography. By Year 8, pupils demonstrate high level mathematical ability, for example, successfully converting worded problems into simultaneous algebraic equations, then calculating the correct solution.
- 3.10 Pupils are highly skilled in using ICT. As pupils move up through the school, they develop a range of skills when handling data, making presentations, coding, communicating and researching. When given the opportunity to do so in lessons, through the use of school devices, pupils use ICT to demonstrate high levels of independence and ownership of their learning. They apply their ICT skills in a wide range of subjects in the classroom. Advanced skills were observed when pupils in Year 7 created a combination climate chart of rainfall and temperature from two distinct geographical areas then analysed the data. Pupils in Year 8 demonstrated excellent understanding of coding to create quiz questions with automated answers. However, senior pupils' responsibility for, and ownership of, their

learning outside lessons is less well developed and they are not able to further develop their personal management of their work.

- 3.11 Pupils develop excellent study skills throughout their time in the school. Pupils are challenged regularly by teachers to question their learning and to develop higher-order thinking skills to investigate and analyse data and draw reasonable outcomes from the process. For example, pupils in Year 7 approached the question of whether winning the battle makes you king. This resulted in informed responses by pupils about the three battles they had recently studied in history. All year groups take part in the 'big think' where challenging concepts and stimuli are intended to provoke deeper thinking and creative problem-solving. For example, through the use of an image of Jesus rising at Easter, pupils responded in a number of different ways; writing, creating images and reflecting upon how other people might be thinking. In science, children in Reception considered whether all metal things are magnetic, testing their theories using magnets on a range of items. Pupils in Year 4 used bullet points to present facts about Greek gods and created for and against columns to manage their findings. Pupils in Year 8, predicted, hypothesised and evaluated the results of experiments when studying oxygen bubbles.
- 3.12 In line with the school's aim for pupils to get involved in school life and beyond, pupils are highly enriched by their achievements in the notably broad range of activities beyond the academic curriculum. Known as the Other Half programme, pupils benefit enormously from this provision, which is a key pillar of the school's mission to successfully encourage the development of well-rounded individuals. Sport features highly within this programme and pupils wholeheartedly participate in a busy series of fixtures as members of 75 teams across 10 sports, including biathlon, cricket, swimming, rugby, football, cross-country, athletics and table tennis. Individual pupils achieve success at high levels in county, regional and national events in all of these sports as well as fencing and squash. Music plays an important role in the life of the school. Governors' provision of excellent facilities has enhanced opportunities for music-making which enables all pupils to become involved in whole school concerts and events, and smaller numbers of singers and instrumentalists engage in ensembles including choir, orchestra, jazz band, brass group and wind band. Individual pupils are successful in nationally assessed music examinations in a range of instruments and two-thirds of candidates regularly gain merits and distinctions. Pupils enter national drama and speaking examinations and consistently attain the higher grades, in addition to gaining drama scholarships to senior schools. Pupils of all ages develop their dramatic skills through their participation in annual performances, from nativity plays in the pre-prep to full-scale productions of popular musicals. Pupils' accomplishments are further expanded through their success in a wide range of national competitions, for example in science, mathematics and art.
- 3.13 Pupils' attitudes to learning are excellent and promote rapid progress. At all stages of their learning and in all subjects, pupils develop independent learning techniques. In the EYFS, children thrive through a learning approach which is often project based, allowing them to explore the curriculum by following their own interests. Pupils in Year 1 exhibited great pride when they shared the paths they had created for ants and demonstrated the outdoor shelters they had built to accommodate their snack time. Pupils in Year 5 presented their independent work on blood vessels, noting the differences between arteries, veins and capillaries. In the pre-inspection questionnaires, almost all pupils agreed that teachers know their subjects well and are supportive.

### **The quality of the pupils' personal development**

- 3.14 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 3.15 Pupils demonstrate excellent self-knowledge and notable levels of understanding of their own strengths and weaknesses. Children in Reception demonstrated high levels of confidence and independence in drama through their responses to how different wild animals move and behave. Through positive and constructive feedback from teachers, and the creation of a safe learning

environment in which mistakes can be made, pupils develop high levels of self-esteem, confidence, discipline and resilience. For example, pupils in Year 6 reflected on previous writing tasks and considered the challenges they found when improving the quality of their work. Pupils learn to understand and reflect on the progress they are making in their learning and are, as a result, well prepared for the next stages of their education and lives.

- 3.16 As pupils deepen their knowledge of themselves and appreciate their current and future needs, they become excellent decision-makers. In history, pupils in Year 4 decided which god to throw out of Mount Olympus. In mathematics lessons, pupils regularly decide which level of difficulty they choose when solving problems. In personal, social and health education (PSHE), pupils in Year 8 discussed relative levels of risk in a range of activities they might choose. They fully recognised the need to discuss decisions which would influence future courses of action. Most pupils feel their voices are heard and valued through their engagement with school committees, such as the school and eco councils and in their tutor groups.
- 3.17 Pupils' spiritual understanding is excellent. They have a mature appreciation of the non-material aspects of life. For example, pupils expressed their feelings about those who fought for their country following their visit to a World War 2 cemetery in France. Others expressed their delight at seeing a volcano at sunrise in Hawaii and looking into a microscope for the first time. Pupils exhibit a strong appreciation of music during lessons and at the start of assemblies. They respond with a heightened sense of wonder when shown the design of upside-down houses, pop-up books and the drone light show of a whale from the Coronation concert. The school's wellbeing programme contributes extremely effectively to the pupils' sense of inner peace and reflectiveness. Friday Finks pose deep and philosophical questions which encourage pupils to investigate their own opinions, reflections and responses to challenging areas of belief; for example, whether God sleeps, if stealing is always wrong and whether small acts of kindness are ever a waste of time.
- 3.18 Pupils happily engage with each other, their teachers and visitors, displaying excellent behaviour. The school embraces and promotes fundamental British values, which in turn translate into the pupils' understanding of respect in general and respect for the school's code of conduct. Pupils distinguish right from wrong and fully appreciate the importance and need for rules and maintaining high standards both in school and in their wider lives. A small minority of pupils did not agree that the school always treats them fairly or that everyone is unfailingly kind and respectful. However, in discussion with pupils they were overwhelmingly positive about their teachers and peers and recognised that some inconsistencies are a part of everyday life. All parents and pupils responding to the questionnaires agreed that the school expects pupils to behave well.
- 3.19 Pupils collaborate freely across the age groups. They work extremely well together as was consistently observed during lessons. Pupils in Year 5 demonstrated excellent teamwork when rehearsing *Hallelujah* in a music lesson. Pupils in Year 7 worked extremely effectively when placing cards in the correct order to show the pathway of blood around the body. Pupils in Year 8 worked highly competently in pairs when considering active and passive Latin verbs. Through regular activities such as sport, music and drama, pupils develop effective and productive strategies to achieve common goals. Pupils collaborate successfully across year groups in interhouse competitions.
- 3.20 Pupils are highly aware of the needs of others and are consistently willing to help each other in class and beyond. Pupils in Years 7 and 8 act as young leaders in the Other Half programme, supplementing the support provided by adults to younger pupils. The various leadership roles made available to pupils from the youngest age, such as pre-prep world warriors, ambassadors, and members of the Year 2 safety squad, enable a growing sense of responsibility and community cohesion. These roles develop further up the school where highly enthusiastic junior equality, diversity and inclusion members (JEDIs), house captains and vice-captains, school and eco councillors demonstrate high levels of mature and compassionate leadership. Various activities to raise considerable amounts of money for house and school charities are willingly led and enthusiastically supported by pupils of all ages. Pupils benefit from opportunities to meet and collaborate with peers from local primary schools, for

example, working together on a science project, and meeting pupil mentors at the foundation's senior school.

- 3.21 Pupils have an excellent cultural understanding and respect for diversity. This is achieved as a result of the school's broad and inclusive curriculum, its effective pastoral programme linked to appropriate assemblies and relevant educational trips. In the questionnaires, all parents agreed that the school actively promotes values of democracy, respect and tolerance of other people. Pupils naturally embrace the various ethnicities represented in the school. They accept difference as being part of being unique and are interested in learning about one another's backgrounds, languages and religions. Respect and tolerance are well-established features of the school community. In discussions, pupils expressed that it does not matter what colour one's skin is, it is what is inside that matters. They explained that everybody is different, but nobody is different in a bad way.
- 3.22 Pupils feel safe at school and know how to keep themselves safe in the wider world and online. They have an excellent understanding of the dos and don'ts of e-safety and display competency in their understanding of how to look after themselves online, supported by assemblies, PSHE and ICT lessons. They understand the importance of a balanced lifestyle, exercise and good food choices. They appreciate the importance of their mental health and that of others, and are mature in their use of the well-resourced listening service, knowing when and from whom to seek help. Pupils in Year 5 expressed an excellent understanding of strategies they could use to help them relax and better manage stress and anxiety. They cited positive affirmation games, yoga exercises and deep breathing techniques. Pupils understand the key features of choosing to be an upstander rather than a bystander and the importance of learning to say no, walk away, tell a teacher and 'call it out'. Pupils feel able to discuss any concerns they may have and are grateful to the staff who support and care for them. The overwhelming majority of parents responding to the questionnaires agreed that the school encourages pupils to adopt a healthy lifestyle.

## 4. Inspection Evidence

- 4.1 The inspectors observed lessons, had discussions with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with members of staff and with a group of governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended registration sessions and an assembly. Inspectors visited the facilities for the youngest pupils, together with the learning support and educational resource areas. Inspectors considered the responses of parents, staff and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires. The inspectors examined curriculum and other documentation made available by the school.

### Inspectors

Mr Alexander Mitchell	Reporting inspector
Miss Kaye Lovejoy	Compliance team inspector (Former head, ISA school)
Mr Richard Evans	Team inspector (Former head, IAPS school)