

School inspection report

28 to 30 April 2026

Abingdon Preparatory School

Josca's House
Kingston Road
Frilford
Abingdon
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The Independent Schools Inspectorate is appointed by the Department for Education to inspect association independent schools in England. Our inspections report on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards and other applicable regulatory requirements are met, collectively referred to in this report as 'the Standards'.

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Summary of inspection findings

1. The school provides a welcoming and purposeful community reflected in established routines, consistent supervision and positive staff-pupil relationships. Pupils are known well as individuals. Leaders promote an ethos in which pupils are encouraged to work hard, show kindness and respect, and participate fully in school life. Pupils show this through their positive attitudes to learning, their engagement in a wide range of opportunities, including the highly effective and inclusive extra-curricular programme, and their willingness to contribute to the school community.
2. Leaders and governors maintain effective oversight of educational provision, safeguarding, attendance and risk through regular review of information. Governors scrutinise this information and engage with leaders, staff and pupils to provide appropriate challenge and support. This enables leaders and governors to maintain accountability and ensure that their statutory responsibilities are met.
3. Leaders plan and review a broad and balanced curriculum that enables pupils to develop knowledge and skills across subjects and apply this over time. Staff use assessment information to adapt teaching and provide support. As a result, pupils make good progress from their starting points, particularly in mathematics, reading and writing. However, in a small minority of lessons, teaching does not provide sufficient challenge or additional guidance when pupils need it. As a result, in these lessons, pupils are less engaged and they do not make the progress of which they are capable.
4. Leaders have used an incisive understanding of pupils' needs to create an exceptionally well-conceived extra-curricular programme. Guided by an expertly designed skills framework, leaders meticulously review participation and patterns of engagement. They are tenacious in ensuring that opportunities are inclusive, relevant and ambitious for all pupils. The long-term impact of leaders' work has a transformative impact on pupils' personal development, allowing them to develop confidence, self-esteem and self-motivation and apply communication and collaboration skills in practical contexts. The impact of this provision on pupils' academic, personal and social development is a significant strength of the school.
5. Staff promote pupils' physical and emotional wellbeing through established pastoral systems, supportive relationships and a comprehensive physical education (PE) programme. Leaders review a range of pastoral information to identify pupils' emerging needs and ensure timely support. Pupils develop positive relationships with staff, demonstrate confidence in seeking help and behave consistently well. As a result, pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing are supported effectively.
6. Leaders provide opportunities for pupils to contribute to school life and take on roles of responsibility. Leaders review participation and engagement with these opportunities and adapt provision in response to feedback. Through this, pupils contribute to decision-making and develop an understanding of fairness, respect and responsibility.
7. Safeguarding arrangements meet requirements. Leaders implement established systems for training, reporting and oversight. Staff receive regular training and follow procedures when concerns arise, and leaders work with external agencies where appropriate. Governors maintain oversight through regular review of safeguarding practice. This enables leaders to identify risk, respond to concerns in a timely manner and support pupils' welfare through appropriate action.

The extent to which the school meets the Standards

- Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance are met.
- Standards relating to the quality of education, training and recreation are met.
- Standards relating to pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing are met.
- Standards relating to pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society are met.
- Standards relating to safeguarding are met.

Recommended next steps

Leaders should:

- ensure that teachers use an understanding of what pupils know and can do, to adapt lessons, so that all pupils are supported to learn and achieve as well as they can.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

8. Leaders establish a clear direction for the school and promote a purposeful culture in which pupils' learning and wellbeing are prioritised. Staff work collaboratively to implement agreed priorities, particularly those focused on improving consistency in pupils' experience. Leaders use their detailed knowledge of individual pupils to shape provision, including through the extra-curricular programme. Leaders review the impact of these priorities through monitoring activities, ensuring that academic and personal development reflect pupils' needs. As a result, the provision is increasingly aligned to pupils' needs.
9. Leaders draw on a wide range of information to review the educational provision and identify priorities for improvement. Monitoring by leaders includes lesson observation, scrutiny of pupils' work, analysis of assessment information and consideration of feedback from staff, pupils and parents. They evaluate this information systematically to identify strengths and areas for development and refine the provision accordingly. This supports ongoing development of the curriculum and wider educational provision. For example, targeted support for early writing for children in the early years is supporting children's fine motor development effectively.
10. The quality of teaching is monitored by leaders through review of classroom practice. They analyse pupils' work and assessment information, alongside direct observation of teaching, to identify strengths and areas for development. Leaders use this monitoring to inform professional dialogue and targeted development for staff. Leaders review the impact of this support through further monitoring of teaching and pupils' work, supporting improvement over time, although some variability in the consistency of teaching remains.
11. Leaders fulfil their responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010. An accessibility plan is in place and reviewed regularly. Leaders adapt provision, resources and the environment in response to pupils' needs, so that pupils are able to participate fully in school life.
12. Leaders understand and implement statutory requirements relating to education, health and care plans (EHC plans). Systems are in place to support pupils should they join the school with this provision, including fulfilling review expectations and engaging with external agencies where appropriate. Leaders notify the local authority when pupils join or leave at non-standard transition points and monitor attendance closely, taking appropriate action where needed.
13. Leaders provide information for parents through reports, meetings and accessible documentation, including policies and previous inspection reports available on the school's website. Leaders review feedback and complaints systematically to identify patterns and evaluate the effectiveness of communication. This supports effective engagement with parents and contributes to ongoing improvement.
14. Leaders manage risk through established systems for assessment and review. Risk assessments are completed and reviewed regularly, and incident information is analysed to identify emerging risks. This enables leaders to take appropriate action and ensures that the environment is suitable to support pupils' wellbeing.
15. Governors maintain effective oversight of the school's work. They review information relating to safeguarding, attendance, risk management and educational provision, and engage with leaders to

provide appropriate challenge and support. Through this oversight, governors ensure accountability and support the ongoing development of the school.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance

16. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

17. Leaders and staff plan a broad and balanced curriculum that enables pupils to acquire knowledge and skills across a wide range of subjects. They plan learning in a sequence that builds pupils' knowledge over time and enables them to apply this to increasingly challenging work. Leaders review the implementation of the curriculum in a range of ways, such as lesson observation, scrutiny of pupils' work and analysis of assessment information. They review and adapt the curriculum, as needed. British values are interwoven carefully within the curriculum content.
18. Teachers have secure subject knowledge and present new learning clearly, building on pupils' prior understanding. Most teachers use a range of approaches, including explanation, modelling and discussion, to support pupils in accessing new concepts. Staff use questioning to check pupils' understanding and extend their thinking, including targeted follow-up questioning to deepen reasoning. However, in a small number of lessons, tasks, support and resources are not sufficiently matched to pupils' needs. As a result, some pupils do not make the progress of which they are capable.
19. Leaders use assessment information to inform curriculum refinement and provide targeted support across subject areas. Leaders discuss this information regularly with staff to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching and adapt the provision where needed. Assessment information is also used by staff to support pupils in understanding how to improve their work and build on prior learning. As a result, pupils develop secure knowledge, make connections across subjects and show increasing confidence in their understanding. They make good progress over time, particularly in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of their time at the school.
20. Staff identify pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) through observation and assessment and provide targeted support that is reviewed regularly by leaders. Leaders evaluate the impact of this support through review meetings, assessment information and ongoing evaluation of pupils' progress, refining strategies where needed. As a result, pupils who have SEND access the curriculum effectively and make good progress from their starting points.
21. Staff support pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) through targeted vocabulary teaching, visual prompts and planned opportunities to develop communication skills. Teachers adapt their practice to support understanding and participation in lessons. Opportunities, such as the languages cafe, support pupils to share and celebrate their home languages. This supports pupils in developing confidence in English and participating fully in learning, while valuing their linguistic background.
22. Pupils engage positively in lessons, including in practical subjects such as music, art, and design technology. Pupils sustain focus and produce work that reflects high levels of technical skill and creativity. A high proportion of pupils participate in instrumental lessons, as well as in a range of large-scale drama and musical productions and ensembles, contributing to a vibrant performance culture. Pupils develop independence, creativity and take increasing ownership of their learning.
23. In the early years, staff deliver an ambitious curriculum, with a high level of focus on communication and language development. Vocabulary is consistently modelled and reinforced by staff, enabling children to apply new language within their learning. Leaders use assessment information, including phonics tracking and ongoing evaluation, to identify children's needs and adapt the provision. As a

result, children develop secure foundations across all areas of their learning, preparing them well for the next stage of their education.

24. Leaders provide a rich range of opportunities that extend learning beyond the classroom. The highly effective extra-curricular programme is a distinctive element of the school's provision. Leaders carefully design and sequence activities throughout the school day, including at social times and before and after school, ensuring that all pupils can participate fully and benefit from sustained engagement over time. Activities are rooted in a clear and ambitious skills framework, and leaders monitor participation closely to secure high levels of engagement and equitable access. As a result, pupils participate widely, often engaging in multiple activities over sustained periods. This sustained participation has a strong impact on pupils' confidence, independence and leadership skills, and refines their communication, problem-solving and collaboration skills. Pupils apply and deepen their learning successfully in different contexts, such as through debating activities, which strengthen communication and reasoning, and in strategy-based activities, which develop analytical thinking and support problem-solving skills.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to the quality of education, training and recreation

- 25. All the relevant Standards are met.**

Section 3: Pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing

26. Staff promote pupils' emotional wellbeing through supportive relationships and a well-developed pastoral system. Staff know pupils well and respond promptly to emerging needs through daily interaction and careful use of pastoral information. Pupils have clear routes to seek support, including direct access to trusted adults, worry boxes and other age-appropriate reporting systems such as 'worry monsters', to share concerns anonymously. Staff review and act on this information. Leaders ensure that concerns are followed up appropriately. Pupils are confident to seek help and receive support that is responsive to their needs.
27. Staff deliver a comprehensive personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) programme, which is adapted in response to pupils' needs and emerging issues. This includes the statutory relationships and sex education (RSE) programme, which is planned in line with current guidance. Teaching addresses topics such as wellbeing, relationships and online safety, supported by assemblies, external workshops and pastoral input. The highly effective extra-curricular programme complements the PSHE and RSE curriculum by enabling pupils to develop self-confidence, self-knowledge and self-awareness. Leaders guide pupils in reflecting on their strengths and areas for development. Through this programme, pupils develop greater confidence in managing their own needs, relationships and challenges.
28. Staff provide regular opportunities for pupils to reflect on their beliefs, values and experiences through assemblies, curriculum discussion and pastoral time. Planned activities, including discussion, sharing of music, collaborative singing and moments of quiet reflection, enable pupils to consider ideas such as identity, responsibility, respect for others and appreciation of different perspectives. Pupils engage thoughtfully in these opportunities, demonstrating increasing awareness of themselves and others, which supports their spiritual and moral development in ways appropriate to their age.
29. Staff establish clear expectations for behaviour, which are reinforced consistently across the school. Leaders maintain oversight through detailed recording and analysis, enabling patterns to be identified and support to be targeted where needed. Pupils behave well in lessons and wider school activities, demonstrating focus, co-operation and respect for others. Incidents of bullying are recorded and reviewed systematically. Staff respond promptly, using restorative approaches to support all pupils involved, alongside targeted pastoral support, so that relationships are repaired. These arrangements support a calm and purposeful environment in which pupils understand that concerns are taken seriously.
30. Leaders ensure that supervision arrangements are effective throughout the school day, including during transitions and recreational periods. Leaders maintain effective oversight of health and safety through systematic risk assessment and ongoing monitoring. Staff implement clear procedures for supervision, site safety and emergency response. As a result, the environment is well managed to support pupils' wellbeing.
31. Leaders maintain effective arrangements to support pupils' health and welfare. Trained staff, including those with paediatric first aid training in the early years, provide appropriate medical care and maintain detailed records of incidents and support.

32. Leaders promote pupils' physical wellbeing through a broad programme of PE, sport and outdoor learning. Pupils participate in regular physical activity and develop co-ordination, stamina and teamwork through lessons and wider opportunities such as the outdoor learning provision. The extra-curricular programme further extends this provision through a wide range of sporting activities that encourage sustained participation and promote healthy lifestyles.
33. In the early years, staff support children's physical and emotional development through consistent routines, warm relationships and responsive provision. Staff use observation and assessment to identify children's needs and adapt support, including targeted approaches to develop self-regulation and early physical skills. This includes opportunities to develop fine and gross motor control, for example through activities that support early writing and co-ordination. As a result, children demonstrate confidence, increasing independence and positive interaction with peers, showing that they are secure and are well prepared for the next stage of their development.
34. Leaders monitor attendance closely through regular analysis. The school's attendance champion has a secure understanding of statutory expectations and works with staff to ensure that registration processes are accurate. Leaders work in partnership with families and with the local authority, where appropriate. These arrangements support pupils' engagement in school life, reducing the risk of absence becoming a barrier to learning or wellbeing.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing

- 35. All the relevant Standards are met.**

Section 4: Pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society

36. Staff promote respectful interaction between pupils through the curriculum and pastoral support, assemblies and daily routines. Pupils are courteous and well behaved in lessons and at less structured times. Expectations are consistently reinforced by staff. Teaching across subjects supports pupils to consider fairness, responsibility and respect, including through exploration of different perspectives, texts and cultural experiences. As a result, pupils develop an understanding of how their actions affect others and contribute positively to the school community.
37. In the early years, children develop social skills through planned opportunities for turn-taking, collaboration and interaction within adult-led and independent tasks. They are supported to undertake collaborative and independent activities in different areas of the classroom and outdoor environment. Staff model expectations and guide children in sharing, co-operating and considering others. As a result, children engage positively with peers, demonstrate awareness of others and contribute to group activities.
38. Leaders provide opportunities for pupils to contribute to school life through a range of leadership and representative roles. Pupils have opportunities to be house captains, class monitors and young leaders. Pupils participate in the school council, the junior equity, diversity and inclusion group (JEDI) and the 'small voices' groups. These groups meet regularly with leaders to share their experiences and influence provision. Pupils present ideas and contribute to discussion. Leaders respond and bring changes, where appropriate, for example through the introduction of additional clubs such as darts and dodgeball, in response to pupils' suggestions. Older pupils take on responsibility as 'young leaders' within the highly effective extra-curricular programme, supporting younger pupils in activities such as sports, clubs and creative sessions. These opportunities enable pupils to develop confidence, responsibility and an understanding of representation and inclusion.
39. Leaders promote pupils' understanding of British values through the curriculum and the wider provision. Pupils develop their knowledge of democracy through participation in elections and discussion of decision-making processes. They explore the rule of law and individual liberty through real-life scenarios, such as considering appropriate responses to anti-social behaviour and discussing fairness in different situations. Leaders review pupils' understanding through discussion, observation and evaluation of pupils' work to ensure that these concepts are understood and applied over time. Pupils show a secure understanding of these concepts and how they apply within school and in wider society.
40. Leaders provide opportunities for pupils to contribute to the wider community through charitable and community initiatives, including participation in local fundraising and community support activities. Pupils participate in local projects, fundraising activities and shared events that develop their awareness of others' needs. Participation in the extra-curricular programme further extends these opportunities, including collaborative projects and performances involving the wider community. These experiences support pupils in recognising how their actions can have a positive impact beyond the school.
41. Teachers develop pupils' economic understanding through curriculum teaching and practical application. Pupils apply their mathematical knowledge in real-life contexts, including using money in practical activities in the early years and making financial decisions as they progress through the

school. For example, pupils plan spending for small projects, consider value for money and reflect on choices made. Older pupils explore concepts such as budgeting, debt and financial planning. These experiences enable pupils to develop an age-appropriate understanding of financial responsibility and decision-making.

42. Leaders support pupils' preparation for the next stage of their education through providing opportunities to meet new teachers and experience the next phase of learning. Pupils spend time in the senior section of the school, attend taster lessons and receive impartial careers guidance about future pathways and options through the careers curriculum and the wider provision. Further guidance is provided through the curriculum and pastoral support from staff. These arrangements ensure that pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education and for life in British society.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society

- 43. All the relevant Standards are met.**

Safeguarding

44. Those with designated safeguarding responsibility maintain effective oversight of safeguarding arrangements through regular review of records, training and reporting systems. They analyse safeguarding information, including patterns in concerns and contextual factors, alongside pastoral and attendance information. They identify potential risks and determine appropriate next steps. Staff use established systems to record and identify concerns, enabling leaders to maintain clear chronologies and prioritise action so that concerns are followed up effectively.
45. Leaders respond to safeguarding concerns in a timely manner and liaise appropriately with external agencies. They maintain clear communication with external partners, including the local authority designated officer and multi-agency support hub. They monitor the progress and outcomes of referrals to ensure that support remains appropriate and responsive. Leaders are also proactive in seeking advice when concerns do not meet thresholds but require further guidance.
46. Staff receive regular safeguarding training aligned with current statutory guidance. This includes induction, ongoing updates and scenario-based discussions, which reinforce expectations and support consistent application of procedures. Leaders evaluate the impact of training through staff practice and review of responses to concerns. As a result, staff remain vigilant, identify potential risks at an early stage and follow reporting procedures without delay.
47. Leaders implement safer recruitment procedures in line with statutory guidance. Required checks are completed and recorded accurately on the single central record of appointments. Governors review these records as part of their oversight responsibilities.
48. Leaders maintain effective oversight of online safety through filtering and monitoring systems, which are reviewed regularly to identify and respond to potential risks. Staff use these systems to identify potential risks and respond appropriately where concerns arise. Staff teach pupils about the safe use of technology through the curriculum and reinforce expectations in daily practice. Pupils develop a clear understanding of how to manage risk when using technology and know how to respond to concerns.
49. Leaders promote a safeguarding culture in which staff share information appropriately and remain responsive to pupils' needs. Safeguarding practice is reviewed regularly through monitoring, record analysis and discussion with staff. Staff understand their responsibilities and respond promptly to concerns. This ensures that safeguarding is embedded in daily practice and that pupils' welfare is supported through timely and appropriate action.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

50. All the relevant Standards are met.

School details

School	Abingdon Preparatory School
Department for Education number	931/6095
Registered charity number	1071298
Address	Abingdon Preparatory School Josca's House Kingston Road Frilford Abingdon Oxfordshire OX13 5NX
Phone number	01865 391570
Email address	school.sec@abingdonprep.co.uk
Website	www.abingdon.org.uk/prep
Proprietor	Abingdon School
Chair	Mr James Sporle
Headteacher	Mrs Nicky Black
Age range	4 to 13
Number of pupils	190
Date of previous inspection	10 to 12 May 2023

Information about the school

51. Abingdon Preparatory School is a co-educational day school located in Frilford near Abingdon. The school is part of Abingdon Schools Group, a charitable trust whose trustees also serve on the governing body. Abingdon School and Abingdon Preparatory School are registered as a single school under one unique reference number for pupils aged 4 to 19 years old. The school operates across two sites, which are inspected separately. Abingdon School, including the boarding provision was inspected separately at the same time as this inspection.
52. This report relates to the provision for pupils aged 4 to 13 on the site known as Abingdon Preparatory School, located on Kingston Road, Frilford. This school comprises three sections: the pre-prep section, for pupils aged 4 to 7 years old; the middle section, for pupils aged 8 to 10 years old; and the senior section, for pupils aged 11 to 13 years old. The headteacher of this school took up her post in January 2026.
53. On a second site, at the school's registered address at Park Road, the school serves pupils who are aged 11 to 19 years old. This school is known as Abingdon School, which is a selective co-educational day and boarding school. The headteacher is Michael Windsor.
54. There are eight children in the early years, comprising one Reception class.
55. Abingdon Preparatory School has identified 27 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. No pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan.
56. Abingdon Preparatory School has identified English as an additional language for a small number of pupils.
57. The school states its aims are to provide a balanced and engaging curriculum within a supportive environment, underpinned by effective teaching, appropriate resources and a range of opportunities beyond the classroom. It seeks to promote pupils' academic progress alongside the development of individual interests and talents. Through a community ethos, partnership with parents and consistent pastoral care, the school aims to support pupils' personal development, encouraging them to demonstrate respect, kindness and confidence, and to be well prepared for the next stage of their education.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

28 to 30 April 2026

58. A team of three inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

59. Inspection activities included:

- observation of lessons, some in conjunction with school leaders
- observation of registration periods and assemblies
- observation of a sample of extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection
- discussions with the chair and other governors
- discussions with the headteacher, school leaders, managers and other members of staff
- discussions with pupils
- visits to the learning support area and facilities for physical education
- scrutiny of samples of pupils' work
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

60. The inspection team considered the views of pupils, members of staff and parents who responded to ISI's pre-inspection surveys.

How are association independent schools in England inspected?

- The Department for Education is the regulator for independent schools in England.
- ISI is approved by the Secretary of State for Education to inspect independent schools in England, which are members of associations in membership of the Independent Schools Council.
- ISI inspections report to the Department for Education on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards, the EYFS statutory framework requirements, the National Minimum Standards for boarding schools and any other relevant standards are met.
- For more information, please visit **www.isi.net**.

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