



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

**Focused Compliance and Educational Quality Inspection Report
For Schools with Residential Provision**

Abingdon School

May 2023

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School's Details

School	Abingdon School		
DfE number	931/6095		
Registered charity number	1071298		
Address	Abingdon School Park Road Abingdon Oxfordshire OX14 1DE		
Telephone number	01235 521563		
Email address	reception@abingdon.org.uk		
Headteacher	Mr Michael Windsor		
Chair of governors	Professor Michael Stevens		
Proprietor	The Governing Body of Abingdon School		
Age range	11 to 19		
Number of pupils on roll	1068		
	Day pupils	935	Boarders 133
	Seniors	714	Sixth Form 354
Inspection dates	10 to 12 May 2023		

1. Background Information

About the school

- 1.1 Abingdon School is an independent day and boarding school for male pupils. Founded in the town of Abingdon in Oxfordshire in the 13th century, it has been located on its present site since 1870. The school is an incorporated charitable trust overseen by its governing body. It merged with its preparatory school, which is separately inspected, in 1998 to form the Abingdon Foundation. Boarding is available from the age of 13 years. Boarding accommodation is in three houses, all of which are on the main school campus.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.2 The school promotes an educational culture that sees the pursuit of high academic standards as equally balanced with the value of pupils engaging in a wide range of extracurricular pursuits and personal development opportunities. It aspires to send its pupils off into adult life as well-rounded people, driven by an innate curiosity about the world, equipped with the desire and skills to rise to the challenges it offers.

About the pupils

- 1.3 Pupils come from a range of professional and business backgrounds, with most living locally. Some boarders also live locally but others come from different countries. Standardised test data provided by the school indicate that the ability of the pupils is well above average in relation to those pupils taking the same tests nationally. The school has identified 119 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), which include dyslexia and dyspraxia, 24 of whom receive additional specialist help. No pupil in the school has an education, health and care (EHC) plan. English is an additional language (EAL) for 136 pupils, most of whom are supported in this regard by their classroom teachers, whilst 26 receive further assistance for English. The school provides additional opportunities within the curriculum for pupils identified as being the most able in the school's population, and extra support is given to other pupils because of their special talents in sport.

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, including the National Minimum Standards for Boarding ('boarding NMS'), where applicable. 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, including the boarding NMS. 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.

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, National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools](#).

Key findings

- 2.1 The school meets the standards in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools 2022 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 GCSE and A-level results in the years 2020 to 2022 confirm 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. Boarders have access to a suitable programme of activities.
- 2.4 Pupils receive relationships and sex education, 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. Boarders' views are actively encouraged, and their opinions and concerns are appropriately considered by staff. Boarders are supported to develop good relationships with fellow pupils and staff which are based on mutual trust and respect. Any prefect system operating in the school is suitably managed.
- 2.7 The standard relating to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development [paragraph 5] and NMS 13, 17 and 21 are 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 An appropriate induction process for pupils new to boarding is implemented, and suitable provision is made for boarders' medical and health care, their food and drink and for managing boarders' laundry and possessions. Boarders have suitable contact with friends and family. Boarding staff are appropriately trained and deployed.
- 2.10 The standards relating to welfare, health and safety [paragraphs 6–16], the requirement of Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010, the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996, and NMS 3, 5–12, 15, 16 and 20 are met.**

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

- 2.11 The school makes appropriate checks to ensure the suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors, and a register is kept as required. Visitors to boarding accommodation are appropriately supervised and the school's arrangements for guardianship are suitably managed.
- 2.12 **The standards relating to the suitability of those in contact with pupils at the school [paragraphs 17–21] and NMS 19 and 22 are met.**

PART 5 – Premises of and accommodation at schools

- 2.13 Suitable toilet and changing facilities, and showering facilities where required by the standard, 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. Boarding accommodation is adequate for the needs of all boarders, and safeguards and promotes their welfare.
- 2.14 **The standards relating to the premises and accommodation [paragraphs 22–31] and NMS 4, 7 and 23 are met.**

PART 6 – Provision of information

- 2.15 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. A suitable statement of boarding principles and practice is published by the school.
- 2.16 **The standard relating to the provision of information [paragraph 32] and NMS 1 are met.**

PART 7 – Manner in which complaints are handled

- 2.17 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, and identifying those relating to the boarding provision.
- 2.18 **The standard relating to the handling of complaints [paragraph 33] and NMS 14 are met.**

PART 8 – Quality of leadership in and management of schools

- 2.19 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 wellbeing of the pupils. Appropriate leadership and management of boarding ensure that the required policies and records are maintained and effectively monitored.
- 2.20 **The standard relating to leadership and management of the school [paragraph 34] and NMS 2 are 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. Where the school's own names differ from those used nationally, the details are given in the table below:

<i>School name</i>	<i>National Curriculum name</i>
First Year	Year 7
Second Year	Year 8
Third Year	Year 9
Fourth Year	Year 10
Fifth Year	Year 11
Lower Sixth	Year 12
Upper Sixth	Year 13

Key findings

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

- Pupils achieve excellent examination results at GCSE, A-level and in pre-U subjects.
- The enormous range of activities promoted through the school's *Other Half* programme enables pupils to develop their skills and talents extremely well and to unlock their enthusiasm.
- Pupils develop highly positive attitudes to learning and independent study.

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

- Pupils demonstrate excellent self-confidence, self-knowledge and self-understanding, both as learners and as individuals in society.
- Pupils become highly effective decision-makers, acutely aware of the consequences of their choices and of the possibilities that will shape their lives.
- Most pupils have a strong awareness of the equality, diversity and inclusion that is largely present in the school.

Recommendations

3.3 The school is advised to make the following improvements.

- To ensure that all pupils demonstrate respect for others' cultural and personal characteristics.

The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements

- 3.4 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.
- 3.5 Pupils reach excellent levels of attainment in lessons, work outside the classroom and external examinations. Pupils of all ages and abilities make excellent progress from their starting points. Pupils achieve at least in line with their potential as a result of the challenge they receive in lessons; they attain extremely high levels in relation to age expectations in all subjects. This is evidenced in their academic results. Pupils' attainment at GCSE has been strong in relation to national averages. Almost half of the GCSE grades awarded in 2022 were at grade 9 and over four-fifths of grades were awarded at 9–7. Attainment in centre-assessed grades in 2020 and teacher-assessed grades in 2021 show similarly strong results. Results at A-level and in pre-U subjects are well above the national average, with over four-fifths of the awarded grades in 2022 at A* or A. Data provided by the school indicate that all groups of pupils, including those with SEND and EAL, make at least good progress from entry to GCSE level and from GCSE to A level. Regular assessment and an excellent system of tracking pupil performance promote these high levels of attainment and progress. School leavers are successful in gaining places at the universities of their choice, including Oxford and Cambridge. The overwhelming majority of parents who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire agreed that teaching enables their child to make progress.
- 3.6 Pupils demonstrate extensive knowledge and understanding across all subjects. Work is mostly well matched to the generally high ability levels of pupils. Highly effective teaching enables the excellent acquisition of knowledge and skills, and promotes a deepening of understanding. In their English language lesson, Year 10 pupils showed strong knowledge of the genre, audience and purpose of the non-fiction text, *127 hours: between a rock and a hard place*, and demonstrated excellent recall of language features, using lexical terms such as semantic field with confidence. In a Year 7 physical education lesson, all pupils demonstrated high levels of proficiency in running, jumping, throwing and catching. Year 12 pupils made excellent progress in appreciating how to predict the feasibility and direction of a chemical reaction. In a Year 9 biology lesson, pupils skilfully analysed relative levels of pollution in plants and their possible sensitivity to nitrogen levels. Pupils displayed a sophisticated understanding of food chains and the reasons for the loss of energy in an eco-system, expertly using data to plot graphs in order to calculate findings and reach conclusions.
- 3.7 Pupils are keen to make progress and their overwhelmingly strong attitude towards their learning is a key factor in assuring their success. Inspectors found a pervasive atmosphere of endeavour and enjoyment of learning in the range of lessons and activities observed. Pupils contribute in lessons and are not afraid of sharing their responses with the teacher and their classmates. In a Year 7 reading and research lesson, pupils relished the balance between these two aspects of learning. Year 12 pupils showed commitment and focus using weights in the gym to improve their fitness and strength in readiness for rugby. Several pupils talked to inspectors about their ambitious extended project qualification. Leaders' and staff's promotion and development of these positive attitudes shows that the school successfully meets its aim of nurturing well-rounded pupils and in so doing develops their skills and characters which are seen as of equal importance to their academic progress and other achievements.
- 3.8 Pupils are excellent communicators. They have highly developed speaking, listening, reading and writing skills. They speak confidently and articulately, displaying high levels of knowledge in an animated manner. In a Year 8 English lesson, pupils readily volunteered articulate oral contributions to explain how the director of the Shakespeare film they had watched had made the film engaging. Year 10 pupils develop high level reading skills in Spanish; they helpfully corrected each other's mistakes as they communicated in the target language, listening carefully and responding thoughtfully to deepen understanding. In a Year 12 religious studies lesson, pupils discussed euthanasia, drew on previous knowledge and research, and constructed an online table to show different perspectives on the issue.

- 3.9 Pupils develop excellent numeracy skills, and confidently apply these in a range of lessons, demonstrating a deep understanding of core principles. In a Year 12 economics lesson, pupils proficiently explored detailed work on cost calculation. In a Year 12 biology lesson, pupils completing revision questions, competently explained how the blood carries oxygen in the presence of carbon monoxide. Year 10 pupils displayed confident use of mathematical skills in their work in biology to analyse respiration. Year 9 pupils used correct mathematical terms such as gradient, quadrant and ratio when constructing a chart of resistance in a physics lesson. In a discussion with Year 8 pupils, they spoke about their engineering science lessons knowledgeably explaining how they are studying the binary system, which they modelled on circuit boards.
- 3.10 Pupils display highly developed study skills, fostered effectively by a study skills programme within a personal social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE) programme and its sixth form equivalent *Mindsets*. Pupils display excellent levels of analysis and prediction. In discussions with inspectors, pupils, including those with special needs, expressed the view that they are proficient at developing learning styles that suit them individually and are confident that they can use a wide range of resources, including in the well-resourced school library, to support their learning. The school succeeds in its aim of encouraging its pupils to think for themselves, to have confidence in their ability and to develop a spirit of independence. This is because of a strong culture of pastoral care, provided through an effective house system, which means that pupils are well known by teachers. Pupils are enthusiastic about the opportunities provided by extended project qualifications to explore subject areas of their own choosing and these projects were seen to further develop their research skills and interest.
- 3.11 Pupils enjoy high levels of success in the creative arts, music, drama and sport. School leaders emphasise the breadth and benefits of opportunities for pupils to develop new skills through an extensive range of *Other Half* activities. Clubs include law mooting, debating, mindfulness, Model United Nations and digital photography, bellringing, bridge and board-gaming as well as musical ensembles, choirs and other opportunities to play music together. About a quarter of all pupils take part in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme (DofE) and older pupils go on to complete silver and gold awards. Pupils who are cadets in the Combined Cadet Force are successful in achieving national awards. Many pupils relish the challenge of and enjoy success in numerous academic competitions such as essay writing, drama examinations, mathematics and science challenges, history, debating and code writing competitions, at both county and national level. Participation in sport is valued as much as success, but a significant number of pupils do enjoy achievement at county level or higher in sports such as rowing, fencing, water polo, rugby and shooting.
- 3.12 Pupils use information and communication technology (ICT) highly effectively to enhance their learning when the opportunities are provided. Pupils are confident in its use to support their own learning, to store work, and to create documents or presentations. Pupils show some good digital technology skills when links to online resources are provided by teachers, such as in a Year 10 ancient history lesson in which pupils researched Athenian democracy. However, pupils do not routinely apply their ICT skills in curriculum areas when it might enhance their progress. In lessons where more sophisticated ICT was used, such as in a Year 12 Geography lesson on glacial depositions, pupils were able to demonstrate higher levels of competence and used ICT to develop their understanding. Year 8 pupils in engineering science made excellent use of school devices to support a circuit design activity. Pupils were able to access instructions and questions as well as record their observations and answers using ICT to support their progress when they were given the opportunity.

The quality of the pupils' personal development

- 3.13 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 3.14 Pupils demonstrate excellent self-confidence and self-understanding, displaying realistic personal understanding without arrogance. They speak enthusiastically about being allowed to be themselves

and are supported in becoming who they want to be. Pupils benefit from the whole school self-review process, *My Abingdon*, which allows pupils to reflect on their own strengths and weaknesses in academic, pastoral and *Other Half* activities and includes regular reflection on what pupils have learned in PHSCE. On the whole, pupils are self-disciplined and appreciate how they can learn from their mistakes. This attitude is promoted by the school's leaders and promoted by the helpful feedback and advice of teachers. Pupils gain confidence in this encouraging and challenging environment, and develop resilience and independence. In a Year 10 Spanish lesson, for example, having analysed their recent examination answers, pupils showed high levels of self-understanding in taking on advice and identifying next steps to improve their performance in the reading, writing and speaking components of their examination next year. They showed an excellent awareness of their strengths and understood what they needed to do to address any weaknesses. Most parents who responded to the questionnaire agreed that the school helped their child to be confident and independent. In addition, boarders who spoke to inspectors said that boarding helped them feel settled and contributed to their personal development.

- 3.15 Pupils have an excellent understanding of how to stay safe and healthy. This is because a comprehensive PSHCE and relationships and sex education programme establishes a strong foundation for pupils to understand and openly talk about their own health and wellbeing. Empathetic, professional interactions between pupils and teachers are a strength of the school. Pupils enjoy their sport at the school and are pleased that there is an extensive range of physical activities on offer; participation levels are high. Pupils understand how to stay safe online and to whom they should go for help if they are concerned about their own or another's welfare. Pupils have a highly developed sense of awareness of their own and other people's mental health and wellbeing.
- 3.16 Pupils are confident decision-makers and relish the opportunities to direct their own learning. In a Year 10 design technology lesson, the teacher introduced a project with a deliberately broad brief, in order to encourage the pupils to make their own decisions about its execution. The pupils were confident in explaining the process of decision-making they had undertaken. Pupils make decisions effectively and assuredly because they are consistently encouraged and supported to do so. This was emphasised by Year 8 pupils in their discussion with inspectors in which they expressed their strong sense of appreciation of the many choices available to them. In a Year 7 registration lesson, pupils were encouraged to 'be more Griffen' in a sophisticated discussion about the decisions that would help each of them to move from 'kid average' to 'kid awesome' and how stepping out of comfort-zones would build resilience. Pupils understand that they can change their lives through effective decision making and through thoughtful consideration of the possible consequences of those decisions.
- 3.17 Pupils display a well-developed spiritual understanding and deep appreciation of the importance of the non-material aspects of life. Pupils expressed a sense of wonder from going to school plays, seeing a piece of art or listening to musical performances. Pupils highlight the role that assemblies, chapel, and the *alt chapel* make in promoting an understanding of spirituality, referencing, for example, an assembly where they had been encouraged to think about an event that had changed them. In a Year 9 philosophy and theology lesson, pupils sensitively and maturely discussed 'why things exist rather than not exist', expressing appreciation for their own place in the world.
- 3.18 Pupils make a significant contribution to the life of the school community and are actively involved in charitable giving and fundraising. They value the wide range of opportunities to take on positions of responsibility, such as working with younger pupils through the peer support system, organising activities, serving as a school prefect, being a school council representative and by contributing to partnership activities as mentors to pupils from visiting schools. They show excellent levels of commitment to fulfilling their responsibilities within the school community, making a positive contribution to the lives of others in the community. For example, they visit local homes for the elderly as part of the Year 9 citizenship programme. Pupils in Year 12 take their mentoring responsibilities seriously and willingly share their experiences of preparing for examinations with Year 9 pupils.

- 3.19 Pupils' moral understanding is excellent, and when behaviour on occasions is not in line with the clear school expectations, pupils themselves sometimes intervene to improve peers' understanding of right and wrong. Pupils' understanding of the need for good behaviour is fostered by an effective system of rewards and a strong house system, which is the focus for pastoral care that actively promotes thoughtfulness and involvement. This culture is mirrored in many lessons, where the high expectations established by teachers encourages pupil responsibility. Year 8 pupils studying 'fast fashion' in geography, understood the ethical issues of workers in Bangladesh, whose poverty was not addressed by the profits made by western companies. Inspectors observed excellent behaviour in the busy dining room. Between lessons, the atmosphere was calm and purposeful, with pupils having time to engage in civilised conversations as they crossed the campus.
- 3.20 Pupils come from a wide range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds and many of them see this diversity as a strength of the school. The overwhelming majority of pupils have an excellent awareness of the need for respect and tolerance but a very small minority of pupils, in response to the questionnaire, expressed the view that pupils were not kind or respectful to each other. A small number of pupil comments indicated that racially hurtful or sexist language had not been completely eradicated. School leaders recognise that the good work of the pupil led equality and diversity group should be built on and strengthened to support all that is being done to help fulfil the aims and ethos of the school in promoting respect for others' cultural and personal characteristics.
- 3.21 Pupils demonstrated strong collaborative skills and worked together well in most lessons seen. In lessons where pupils are encouraged to work collaboratively, they are helped to develop each other's skills academically and socially. For example, in a Year 7 physical education lesson, pupils working in small groups recognised that their success and development in the task was directly affected by the advice and feedback of their partner. Pupils are socially aware and enjoy celebrating each other's successes and clearly value everyone's efforts. Pupils typically demonstrate good relationships with their teachers, have excellent manners and are very polite and considerate to one another. In Year 12 design technology, pupils have the opportunity to study co-educationally, as is the case in some other A-level subjects. Pupils expressed the view that this collaboration with others from another school improves their personal development. Collaboration within the school is fostered by well-managed house common rooms, the provision of spacious break-out zones in the newly built science building, and by comfortable and colourful spaces in the library, all of which encourage pupils to come together. A strong school governing body provides appropriate challenge and support to school leaders and together they have had the vision to provide the infrastructure and systems which underpin excellent outcomes for pupils.

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 a group of governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended tutor group meetings and chapel. Inspectors visited boarding houses and 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 Michael Goodwin	Reporting inspector
Mrs Alison Hewitt	Accompanying reporting inspector
Mr Andrew Skinnard	Compliance team inspector (Deputy head, HMC school)
Mr Matthew Thornby	Team inspector for boarding (Head of boarding, HMC school)
Mr Stephen Challoner	Team inspector (Former director of staffing, HMC school)
Mrs Sandra Clements	Team inspector (Former deputy head, GSA school)
Mr Andrew Gough	Team inspector (Former head, IAPS school)
Mr Neil Smith	Team inspector (Head, HMC school)
Mr Simon Wilson	Team inspector (Former head, SoH school)