

School inspection report

28 to 30 April 2026

Abingdon School

Park Road

Abingdon

OX14 1DE

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. Leaders and governors prioritise the wellbeing of pupils in the decisions that they take. They undertake thorough self-evaluation, informed by a suitable range of evidence, and identify precise priorities for improvement. They take appropriate and timely action to bring improvements, and implement policies and procedures effectively. Systems, such as those for complaints and risk management, are clearly understood and applied consistently. Governance provides appropriate challenge and support, checking on the effectiveness of leaders' work. Oversight by leaders and governors ensures accountability and compliance. Collectively, they ensure that the Standards are met consistently.
2. Leaders implement a broad and suitably structured curriculum which enables pupils to build on prior learning. Teaching supports pupils' learning, and assessment is used appropriately to monitor how well pupils are faring and inform adaptations to teaching. Pupils are supported effectively to access the curriculum. Suitable systems are in place to identify and meet individual needs, enabling pupils to participate in lessons and learn effectively. A varied co-curricular programme provides opportunities for pupils to extend their learning and contribute to the wider community. These include sustained partnerships with local organisations.
3. Leaders support pupils' physical and emotional wellbeing and personal development. Pupils' behaviour and attitudes are consistently positive. They engage appropriately in lessons and wider activities and demonstrate respect for others. Relationships between pupils and staff contribute to a calm and orderly environment. Leaders ensure that the site is well managed and safe. The curriculum teaches pupils how to keep themselves safe, healthy and well.
4. Pupils develop a thorough understanding of fundamental British values. They contribute positively to the school and the wider community. The school provides a structured careers programme which supports older pupils in making informed decisions about their future. However, the curriculum related to careers in Years 7 and 8, although in development, is not ensuring that all pupils develop a thorough age-appropriate understanding of the wide-ranging careers available to them.
5. Boarding provision is effectively led and integrated within the wider school community. Boarders benefit from suitable pastoral care, clear routines and a supportive environment. Boarders are well looked after by experienced, well-trained staff. Boarding accommodation is well maintained, and boarders benefit from a wide range of activities during the evening as well as appropriate support for their studies.
6. Leaders promote an effective safeguarding culture. Leaders oversee effective procedures, appropriate training and oversight, and take timely action. Safer pre-employment recruitment processes are implemented consistently. Pupils are safe and supported.

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:

- strengthen the careers education provided to pupils in Years 7 and 8 so that they have a more thorough age-appropriate understanding of the careers available to them.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

7. Governors are knowledgeable and proactive, bringing a breadth of professional expertise. They maintain effective oversight through structured reporting, committee work, visits to the school and boarding houses, lesson walks and discussions with staff and pupils. Governors provide appropriate challenge and support of leaders' work, ensuring that the Standards are met consistently.
8. Leaders and governors work together effectively to provide clear strategic direction, underpinned by a well-established vision and a commitment to securing the best possible opportunities for pupils. Leaders draw on a suitable range of evidence, including academic performance, stakeholder feedback and departmental review, to inform self-evaluation and identify priorities. This leads to a coherent whole-school development plan, which is monitored systematically through regular review. Leaders take timely action to secure improvements in the school's provision.
9. Leaders maintain oversight of teaching and learning through activities such as lesson visits, scrutiny of pupils' work and professional dialogue. This enables leaders to develop an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. Leaders consult regularly with staff and pupils and respond constructively to feedback, contributing to a reflective and collaborative culture. Staff professional development is structured and provides opportunities for staff training, coaching and appraisal. As a result, the curriculum is well planned and resourced, enabling teachers to deliver the curriculum as leaders intend, and pupils to learn well.
10. Boarding is led effectively by experienced and knowledgeable staff who ensure the consistent adherence and compliance to the National Minimum Standards for boarding schools (NMS). Systems for communication, pastoral care and record-keeping are established, ensuring that boarders are supported in a safe and structured environment. Boarders' wellbeing is central to leaders' decision-making. Induction and guardianship arrangements are robustly managed.
11. Leaders provide parents with appropriate information through the school's website, reports and consultation events. Communication is clear and enables parents to be informed about their child's progress and school developments. The required information for parents, such as policies, are available on the school's website. The school engages appropriately with external agencies. They inform the local authority when pupils join or leave at non-standard transition points. They work with local safeguarding partners appropriately.
12. Leaders implement a suitable complaints policy and procedure. Leaders implement this policy effectively. Concerns are handled in line with their policy, with clear processes for escalation and oversight by governors where required.
13. Leaders' approach to risk management is thorough. They identify and mitigate a full range of risks, related to the school site, the curriculum and off-site activity. A risk register is maintained and reviewed regularly by leaders and governors. Staff are trained to carry out risk assessments across a range of contexts, including the management of the school site. They enact the risk management protocols with a fidelity and effectiveness. Collectively, leaders and staff ensure that risks are managed appropriately.
14. Leaders fulfil their responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010. A suitable accessibility plan is in place and routinely reviewed. Leaders ensure that all pupils can access the curriculum and site effectively.

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

15. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

16. Leaders implement a broad and suitably structured curriculum, where planning builds sequentially to support pupils to develop thorough knowledge and skills. Pupils study a wide range of subjects, academic, creative and technical, supported by planning which enables them to build on prior learning. It plans to support pupils to be well ready for the rigours of examinations, qualifications and accreditation in Years 11 and 13. The curriculum provides opportunities for pupils to develop their understanding, work independently and engage in extended tasks and critical thinking, such as the Extended Project Qualification (EPQ).
17. Teaching supports pupils' learning effectively. Teachers have secure subject knowledge and use a range of approaches to develop pupils' understanding. Teachers build on prior knowledge and use targeted questioning to extend thinking. Pupils engage appropriately and contribute to discussion, articulating their ideas and applying their learning in more complex and independent ways. For example, in Year 12 politics, pupils contribute thoughtfully to discussions about complex issues related to the Xinhai Revolution (1911). In drama and music, pupils participate in a range of performances, including *Shrek the Musical*, *Twelfth Night* and Dvořák's *Symphony No. 9*, which support the development of confidence and creative skills. Teaching takes place in a calm and purposeful environment.
18. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are supported effectively. Leaders identify needs through a range of screening and assessment. They identify and provide appropriate strategies and support. They provide information to staff, so that lessons can be adapted to support pupils' needs and ensure that they can access the curriculum. As a result, pupils who have SEND learn effectively and achieve well.
19. Pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) receive appropriate support to develop their language skills. This includes structured vocabulary development to reinforce key terminology in lessons and additional guidance. Additional tuition is provided for pupils where appropriate, when they need to develop their linguistic skills. Over time, pupils develop the essential language skills that they need to successfully access the curriculum and learn effectively.
20. Leaders implement a suitable assessment framework. Leaders use a range of assessment information to monitor pupils' progress and inform teaching. Teachers use assessment information to provide guidance and feedback so that pupils understand how to improve their work. When needed, leaders support pupils where they need more specialist or individual support. As a result, pupils achieve very well across a range of subjects. Pupils' attainment at GCSE and A level is high against national averages in most subjects.
21. The school's co-curricular programme, the 'Other Half', provides a wide range of opportunities for pupils to extend their learning beyond the classroom. Partnership work, such as the 'OX14 Learning Partnership' with local organisations, and a range of sporting activities, as well as The Duke of Edinburgh's Award, enable pupils to apply their knowledge and skills in different contexts. Pupils take part in activities such as working with local primary schools, contributing to events, volunteering and charitable fundraising, which support the development of communication and organisational skills. Leaders seek and use the views of pupils to develop the school's co-curricular programme, such as the extension of the Warhammer Club for older pupils.

22. Boarding provision supports pupils' academic and social development. Boarders follow structured routines which support independent study and participation in a balanced programme of activities. There is a suitable range of organised study, activities and personal time. Boarders access an active evening and weekend activities programme and excursions, developing and cementing relationships within the community.

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

23. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

24. Leaders have established and implemented effective policies and procedures related to behaviour. They maintain oversight through detailed recording and analysis, enabling patterns to be identified and support to be targeted where needed. Relationships between pupils and staff are positive and characterised by mutual respect. Pupils' behaviour and attitudes are consistently positive. They are respectful and responsible. They engage positively in lessons, show respect and kindness to one another and take responsibility for their actions. As a result, behaviour is calm and orderly, contributing to a secure environment.
25. Leaders take proactive steps to prevent bullying. An anti-bullying strategy is implemented effectively, supported by pastoral systems and restorative approaches which support pupils in reflecting on their behaviour. Through personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE), assemblies and pastoral support, pupils develop an understanding of respectful relationships and responsible behaviour. Consequently, incidents of bullying are rare, and leaders take appropriate action to address any issues.
26. Pupils' emotional wellbeing is well supported. Pupils are taught about the importance of looking after their emotional and physical health. Leaders provide a range of opportunities to recognise, reward and celebrate pupils' achievement. For instance, a large array of pupils' certificates and awards are displayed on school noticeboards and personalised boarding space. This supports pupils' confidence and self-esteem. Effective tutor and pastoral support provide pupils with direct access to trusted adults and guidance when they need it. Where required, leaders seek external specialist professional expertise, such as mental health teams, to help pupils get the help they need.
27. Leaders ensure that PSHE lessons and relationships and sex education (RSE) are appropriately planned and delivered by trained staff and external contributors. These support pupils in understanding relationships, personal safety and wellbeing. Pupils learn about consent and boundaries, positive relationships, and how to manage their wellbeing. Leaders consult with pupils and parents to ensure that provision is appropriate. Pupils engage with moral and ethical issues and develop respect for others including topics such as the effects of discriminatory language.
28. There is a thoroughly planned and well-taught physical education (PE) curriculum. Pupils develop their skills and knowledge of sports, fitness and exercise. The curriculum is enhanced by activities in outdoor education, co-curricular provision, the Combined Cadet Force (CCF) and competitive fixtures and tournaments. Sporting activities are wide ranging and inclusive, enabling pupils of varying abilities and interests to take part.
29. Boarding provision supports pupils' wellbeing. Boarding staff provide a supportive environment, accommodation is clean, comfortable and well maintained. Boarders have places to store their personal belonging, laundry facilities and access to a balance of healthy food options and snacks outside mealtimes. The school makes appropriate provision for boarders' dietary needs, and a range of hot and cold food options are available. Boarders are supported to keep regular communication with their families, when they wish to.
30. Health and safety arrangements, including those related to fire safety, are effective. The site is well maintained, including boarding provision. There is appropriate provision and accommodation for the

first aid and medical care of pupils, including boarders overnight. Staff are well trained in their respective responsibilities. They enact leaders' intended risk management processes effectively. Appropriate procedures are in place to supervise pupils during on- and off-site activities. Records for all areas of the school's health, safety and first aid provision are detailed, well maintained and routinely reviewed by leaders and governors. Any issues are quickly identified and resolved quickly.

31. Admission and attendance registers are maintained in line with requirements. Leaders work with families where pupils need support to attend and take appropriate action where necessary. Leaders work closely with external agencies when needed, including reporting to the local authority when pupils join or leave the school at non-standard transition points.

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

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

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

33. The curriculum teaches pupils to understand values such as respect, inclusion and tolerance. Pupils are provided with well-planned opportunities to learn about those from diverse backgrounds, faiths, beliefs and cultures. Discussion and learning about inclusion and tolerance helps pupils to develop a respect for those of diverse views and experiences. The curriculum is enriched by events such as culture day, Pride Month and Black History Month, that teach about tolerance and consideration for others.
34. Through the curriculum, pupils are taught about important British values, such as democracy, rule of law and right and wrong. They learn about topics such as civic and criminal law, the role of public services such as the police and the importance of legislation and law courts. They receive a balanced range of information about different political viewpoints, parties and their manifestos. This learning readies pupils to understand the importance of listening to viewpoints different from their own, taking responsibility for actions, cause and consequence and right and wrong.
35. Pupils contribute positively to the school and the wider community. School activities, such as the 'Other Half' and the 'OX14 Learning Partnership', provide pupils opportunities to work with local organisations, as well as working with local primary schools, care homes and community garden projects. In school, pupils undertake leadership roles mentoring younger pupils and as prefects. Sixth-form pupils help younger pupils through homework support and subject-based mentoring. Additional enrichment activities, such as through the CCF, help pupils to develop confidence and take on responsibility.
36. The school provides careers guidance which supports pupils in making informed decisions, through a structured careers programme. As they get older, they receive opportunities to partake in work-related learning and work experience. The oldest pupils benefit from impartial and individualised guidance and support about a range of education, training and employment opportunities. For example, many pupils are well supported in preparing for their chosen careers in medicine, including preparation for admissions testing and interview. The careers guidance provided for younger pupils in the lower years is more limited. They do not develop a thorough, age-appropriate understanding of the careers available to them. Leaders' plans to develop this curriculum are not yet implemented.
37. Pupils develop an economic understanding, including learning related to civic matters, financial education and how services operate. Through the curriculum, they learn about topics such as managing money, making informed decisions, gambling, and financial scams, alongside learning related to law and ethics. They also benefit from activities such as trading club.

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

38. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

39. Leaders have established an effective safeguarding culture. They prioritise the pupils' safeguarding and wellbeing in the decisions that they take. Governors provide appropriate oversight through regular reporting and scrutiny, including checks of the pre-employment and recruitment procedures, ensuring compliance with legal responsibilities. Collectively, they ensure that policies and procedures reflect current statutory guidance, are reviewed regularly and are available on the school's website.
40. Leaders with responsibility for safeguarding are suitably trained and experienced. The safeguarding team maintain appropriate oversight of concerns and take timely action. Leaders work effectively with a range of external agencies, as required, such as children's services. Safeguarding records are maintained securely and enable concerns to be recorded and monitored over time. Leaders review safeguarding information regularly, such as surveys and behaviour and wellbeing records, to identify patterns, ensure timely action is taken and evaluate the effectiveness of their work.
41. Staff receive regular safeguarding training aligned with current statutory guidance. This includes induction, child-on-child abuse, contextual safeguarding, and low-level concerns about adults who work with pupils. Staff are vigilant, identify concerns and follow reporting procedures without delay.
42. Pupils are provided with a range of mechanisms to raise concerns, including confidential reporting systems. They know who to approach if they have concerns. Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe through the PSHE and RSE curriculums, which addresses topics such as online safety, risk awareness and healthy relationships. Leaders have appropriate filtering and monitoring systems for online and digital activity. Leaders use these systems appropriately to identify and act quickly on any issues that arise.
43. Leaders ensure that safeguarding arrangements in boarding are well considered and implemented. Leaders and staff are well trained. There are appropriate procedures for the management of visitors, supervision, medical care, emergency arrangements and communication. Boarders are well taught about how to report concerns, including to the well-publicised independent person.
44. Leaders ensure that the requirements and procedures to ensure the safer recruitment of adults are appropriate and effective. All required pre-employment checks are completed and recorded accurately on the single central record of appointments. These are routinely checked by leaders and governors to ensure compliance and accuracy.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding.

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

School details

School	Abingdon School
Department for Education number	931/6095
Registered charity number	1071298
Address	Abingdon School Park Road Abingdon Oxfordshire OX14 1DE
Phone number	01235 521563
Email address	as.reception@abingdon.org.uk
Website	www.abingdon.org.uk
Proprietor	Abingdon School
Chair	Mr James Sporle
Headteacher	Mr Michael Windsor
Age range	11 to 19
Number of pupils	1079
Number of boarding pupils	150
Date of previous inspection	10 to 12 May 2023

Information about the school.

46. Abingdon School is a selective co-educational day and boarding school. The school is part of Abingdon Schools Group, a charitable trust whose trustees also serve on the governing body. The school is 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 Preparatory School, which is located in nearby Frilford, and caters for pupils aged 4 to 13 years old, was inspected separately at the same time as this inspection.
47. This report relates to the provision for pupils, including boarders, aged 11 to 19, who are based on the site known as Abingdon School, registered at Park Road. This site comprises three sections: a lower school, for pupils in Years 7 and 8; a middle school, for pupils in Years 9 to 11; and a sixth form, for pupils in Years 12 and 13.
48. There are three boarding houses on the Abingdon School main site. They provide a range of boarding accommodation for boarders aged 13 to 19 years old.
49. The school has identified 206 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. No pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan.
50. The school has identified English as an additional language for 80 pupils.
51. Abingdon School states its aims are to provide a well-rounded education that enables pupils to develop academically, personally and socially, preparing them for life beyond school. A key aim is to encourage pupils to seize opportunities and pursue excellence, both in and beyond the classroom. This is reflected in a broad curriculum and extensive co-curricular provision designed to develop intellectual curiosity, creativity and a commitment to high standards. The school also aims to foster respect and integrity, promoting strong relationships, inclusivity and a sense of responsibility within the community. Pupils are encouraged to contribute positively to society, developing empathy, resilience and an understanding of their role in a wider context. Another central focus is on developing independent, confident learners who can think critically, engage with complex ideas and take ownership of their learning. Opportunities for leadership, collaboration and service support this aim. Overall, the school seeks to ensure that pupils leave as well-educated, grounded and capable individuals, equipped with the skills, values and confidence to succeed in a rapidly changing world.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

28 to 30 April 2026

52. A team of nine inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

53. 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
- visits to boarding houses accompanied by pupils and staff
- scrutiny of samples of pupils' work
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

54. 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**.

Independent Schools Inspectorate

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