ISI Independent Schools Inspectorate

School inspection report

6 to 8 October 2026

Abbot's Hill School

Bunkers Lane

Hemel Hempstead

HP3 8RP

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 place great emphasis on promoting pupils' wellbeing. They make this their key consideration in all the decisions they make. Leaders share their vision with staff, pupils and parents so that it is known and understood by the whole school community. They create a harmonious and welcoming school where pupils feel safe and valued.

2. The curriculum is interesting, engaging and well matched to pupils' ages and abilities. Teachers have good subject knowledge that they use to deliver the curriculum effectively. Pupils develop good attitudes to learning. They make good progress from their individual starting points, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

3. Leaders provide effective support for pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) so that they make good progress from their individual starting points.

4. Early years provision is carefully considered and matched to children's needs and stage of development. Leaders and staff are knowledgeable about the needs of very young children. The curriculum is well designed and delivered effectively. Children make good progress during their time in the Reception class and routinely achieve a good level of development.

5. Pupils achieve well at GCSE level. Results are routinely above the national average, with a high proportion of pupils attaining the highest grades in many subjects. In a small minority of subjects, the curriculum is delivered less effectively. Where this is the case, fewer pupils achieve the highest grades than elsewhere in the curriculum.

6. The personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) curriculum is extensive. Pupils learn about a wide range of issues, including relationships and sex education (RSE). The curriculum is delivered effectively. It gives pupils the knowledge and skills they need as they progress through the school and approach adult life.

7. The careers programme is detailed and well considered. Pupils in the senior school are given the support and advice they need. They are given opportunities to find out about different careers, including throughout work experience.

8. The school has an effective safeguarding culture. Leaders and staff are knowledgeable and well trained. Staff are vigilant and report any concerns about pupils promptly. Leaders respond swiftly to concerns that are raised and take suitable action to protect pupils, when necessary.

9. The school provides parents of current and prospective pupils with almost all of the required information via its website. A small amount of information was missing from the website at the beginning of the inspection. This was fully rectified before the end of the on-site inspection.

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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:

- develop the effectiveness of the curriculum, and how it is delivered, in a small number of subjects so that a greater proportion of pupils attain the higher grades at GCSE
- ensure that all required information is always made available to parents of current and prospective pupils on the school's website.

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Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

10. Leaders make promoting pupils' wellbeing their key priority. They take a holistic view of education, focusing on all aspects of wellbeing, not just pupils' academic progress. Leaders share their vision with pupils, parents and staff so that it is widely known and understood. Leaders' focus on wellbeing pervades all aspects of the school's work. As a result, leaders and staff routinely focus on what is in pupils' best interests as they go about their day-to-day work.

11. Leaders have good knowledge and skills, that they use effectively. Leaders use well-considered processes to continually check the quality of all aspects of the school's work. They probe different aspects of the school, such as the effectiveness of individual subject departments, on rotation. Leaders use this process to identify key priorities for the school's development. They put suitable plans in place to continually develop and improve the school, which they implement effectively.

12. The early years provision is led effectively because leaders know about and understand the particular needs of very young children. Leaders follow statutory guidance closely so that all early years requirements, including those about the curriculum, safety and staffing ratios, are met.

13. The school meets its duties under the Equality Act 2010. The accessibility plan is appropriate and up to date. It focuses well on ensuring pupils' access to the curriculum and co-curricular programme, as well as physical access to the buildings and grounds.

14. Leaders work effectively with the local authority and other agencies, as necessary. They report to the local authority when pupils leave or join the school at non-standard transition points. Leaders liaise appropriately with the local authority about pupils who have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan), providing all required documents and information.

15. The proprietor puts effective governance arrangements in place. The court of governors meets regularly to monitor and review the school's effectiveness. Governors know the school well and have frequent contact with leaders. They balance holding leaders to account with providing them with support. Governors use robust systems to assure themselves that leaders have the skills and knowledge they need and that the Standards are met consistently.

16. Risk management processes are rigorous. Leaders are knowledgeable and suitably trained. They identify risks across all areas of the school's work, including those that are not immediately obvious. Leaders put suitable control measures in place to mitigate the risks identified. These are reviewed regularly and revised as necessary.

17. Leaders review policies regularly. They keep up to date with changes to guidance and legislation and make any changes to policies that are necessary in response. Leaders share policies with staff, parents and pupils appropriately. Policies are implemented consistently throughout the school.

18. Leaders provide almost all the required information on the school's website so that it is easily available to parents of pupils and prospective pupils. At the beginning of the on-site inspection, the website did not contain two of the school's previous inspection reports or the proprietor's phone number, and the attendance policy on the website did not include registration times. This was rectified before the end of the on-site inspection. Leaders provide parents with detailed written reports about their child's progress and attainment.

19. The school has a suitable complaints policy that is made available on its website. The policy is implemented effectively. Leaders encourage informal communication with parents so that concerns can be raised at an early stage. When concerns are raised, leaders investigate them thoroughly and objectively. They keep detailed records of all complaints that are raised, the investigations that are carried out and the outcome of the process.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

20. The school's curriculum provides suitable breadth across the school and meets pupils' needs well. The school uses the national curriculum as its starting point. In addition to national curriculum subjects such as English, mathematics, science, history and art, pupils in the prep also learn about subjects such as drama, religious studies (RS) and philosophy, ethics and religion. Pupils take part in weekly outdoor sessions in the school's woodland areas. They receive specialist teaching in drama, French, music and physical education (PE) throughout the prep school.

21. The curriculum provides younger senior pupils with a broad base of knowledge on which to decide their subject options. In Year 10 and Year 11, pupils study a core of English language and literature, mathematics and science. Pupils select their options from a broad range of choices including art and design, computing, dance, drama, food and nutrition, French, geography, history, music, photography and Spanish. In Year 9 and Year 10, pupils take part in the school's 'inspired' programme. Each term they choose an option from an extensive list, including current affairs, child development and gardening, to study during the weekly 'inspired' slot. The curriculum provides pupils with access to subjects that interest and engage them.

22. Pupils make good progress throughout the school. They achieve well and GCSE results are consistently above the national average. In many subjects, each year, a notable proportion of pupils achieve the highest grades at GCSE. However, in a small number of subjects the curriculum is delivered less effectively. Where this is the case, attainment is lower, with fewer pupils attaining grades 7 to 9.

23. The curriculum in the early years covers the seven areas of learning well. Children develop their knowledge, skills and understanding across all areas, including literacy, mathematics and communication and language. The curriculum is delivered through a carefully considered mix of adult-led activities and those that children access independently. The school uses a well-chosen phonics programme to teach children early reading and writing skills. Alongside this, staff frequently share stories and other books with children to encourage them to develop a love of reading. Children make good progress during their time in Reception so that they are ready to move on to Year 1 when the time comes.

24. Teachers throughout the school have good knowledge and understanding of the subjects they teach. This enables them to explain new learning clearly, anticipate misconceptions that may arise and help pupils to develop their understanding when they get stuck. Teachers plan and deliver lessons that are interesting, engaging and well matched to pupils' needs and interests. This encourages pupils to develop positive attitudes to learning that help them to make good progress.

25. Provision for pupils who have SEND is well organised and effective. Leaders put individual 'passports' in place that detail pupils' individual needs and effective strategies to address them. Passports are shared with staff so that pupils' needs are known and understood well. Staff adapt the curriculum and how it is taught effectively. Where appropriate, they use suitable resources to support pupils. Pupils who have SEND make good progress from their starting points.

26. Pupils who speak EAL are identified as part of the school's admission procedures. Pupils are provided with effective support that enables them to achieve well. For example, teachers provide word banks

to help pupils become familiar with key vocabulary as well as additional opportunities to practise less familiar grammatical elements. As a result, pupils who speak EAL make good progress.

27. The school has a well-developed approach to assessment. Teachers routinely check pupils' knowledge and understanding as part of their usual teaching practice. In addition, pupils regularly undertake more formal assessment to check how well they understand and remember what they are taught. These assessments are used effectively to identify areas where pupils need more support or challenge. Assessment information shows that pupils make good progress throughout the school.

28. The school's curriculum is enhanced by an extensive co-curricular programme. The school offers a very wide range of clubs, which take place both during lunchtime and after school. The co-curricular offer is deliberately broad so that there are options for everyone including, for example, cooking, knitting, choir and sports. The curriculum is further enhanced by regular educational visits and residential trips. The co-curricular offer helps pupils to learn specific skills alongside developing confidence and learning to work effectively as part of a team.

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

29. Leaders make clear their expectation that everyone should be treated with respect. From the early years onwards, children learn about the importance of treating other people fairly and kindly. Staff model respectful behaviour in their interactions with pupils and with other adults. Messages about the importance of mutual respect are reinforced through assemblies, form time and throughout the curriculum. Pupils respond positively to these messages. They behave respectfully towards adults and their peers.

30. Pupils are taught about the similarities and differences between people, particularly through the PSHE curriculum. Pupils learn about the importance of equality and treating other people fairly. This helps pupils to develop positive attitudes towards other people and to celebrate the diverse nature of society.

31. Pupils learn about religion throughout the school. This helps them to develop an understanding of a broad range of beliefs, customs and traditions. Pupils are given opportunities to develop and express their own spirituality. For example, they develop an appreciation of the beauty and wonder of nature during their woodland sessions.

32. The PSHE programme is appropriate and well considered. It covers a broad range of areas, including self-awareness, belonging, ambitions and goals, resilience and healthy lifestyles. The curriculum is delivered effectively. Pupils develop skills and knowledge in key areas that help to prepare them for their adult lives.

33. Relationships and sex education forms part of the PSHE curriculum. Schemes of work are well considered and closely matched to pupils' age and stage of development. The youngest pupils begin by learning about families and friendships. Older pupils learn about intimate relationships and how to keep themselves healthy and safe. Pupils are given the knowledge and understanding they need as they approach their adult lives.

34. The PE curriculum is suitable, extensive and taught by specialist staff. Pupils learn about and take part in a wide range of sports, including cross-country running, lacrosse, dance and tag rugby. Pre-prep and prep pupils have a weekly swimming lesson. This ensures that pupils can swim competently by the time they join the senior school. Pupils continue to have regular swimming lessons throughout their time in the senior school. Pupils develop positive attitudes to sport and fitness during their time at the school.

35. In the early years, children are provided with plentiful opportunities for physical development. They take part in weekly PE and swimming lessons taught by specialist staff. These help them to develop a range of skills. In the classroom, children take part in activities that help them to build up their finger strength and dexterity. Throughout the day, they are given access to outdoor spaces and activities, including learning in the woodland area, which helps them to develop their gross motor skills.

36. Pupils behave very well throughout the school. The school's expectations are high, and pupils respond positively to this. They follow the rules, are polite and well mannered and treat other people with kindness and consideration. Leaders put suitable measures in place so that pupils do not

have access to or use mobile phones during the school day. Pupils abide by the rules put in place and understand the benefits of the school being a mobile phone-free environment.

37. Pupils learn about bullying and the forms it can take through PSHE lessons and in assemblies. They learn what to do if they are concerned for themselves or about one of their peers. Bullying happens very rarely. When it does occur, it is dealt with appropriately and effectively.

38. Health and safety arrangements, including those relating to fire safety, are robust. Leaders use a range of external contractors to assure themselves that health and safety requirements are met. When remedial actions are identified, these are carried out promptly. The premises are suitable and well maintained.

39. First aid arrangements are detailed and well organised. A suitable number of staff are qualified in first aid, including paediatric first aid in the early years. Staff have good knowledge and understanding in this area, including about safer eating and about risks associated with allergies.

40. The school's admission and attendance registers meet current requirements. Leaders monitor attendance closely and take effective action, when necessary, in response to absences.

41. Pupils are supervised appropriately throughout the day, including during breaktimes and mealtimes. Pupils develop positive relationships with staff that help them to feel safe and secure when they are at school.

42. The school has an appropriate prefect system in both the prep and senior schools. Pupils are given suitable roles and responsibilities and are supervised by staff.

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

43. The school's ethos is closely aligned with fundamental British values, such as individual liberty, democracy and mutual respect and tolerance. Pupils learn about these values explicitly through the PSHE curriculum, assemblies and other subjects such as history, where appropriate. Pupils are taught, for example, about the British parliamentary system and the importance of voting. They are given opportunities to see democracy in practice, such as through the work of the school council.

44. Pupils are helped to develop social and cultural knowledge in a range of ways. For example, they learn about different beliefs, customs and traditions in RS. They also explore the range of personal characteristics that people share, including race, disability and age, and the importance of treating everyone fairly and considerately. Pupils develop positive attitudes to other people and learn to celebrate the diversity in society.

45. Pupils are encouraged to gradually become more independent and to take responsibility for themselves as they move through the school. They are given opportunities to take on roles that help them to develop leadership skills. For example, all pupils in Year 6 are given a prefect role with specific responsibilities. Older pupils can choose to take a sports leadership qualification as part of the school's 'inspired' programme.

46. The 'inspired' programme also gives older pupils opportunities for volunteering in the community, including local primary schools, residential homes and the school's own on-site nursery. Pupils throughout the school learn about charities and the importance of helping others. They raise money for a range of organisations, such as a local homelessness charity, through activities such as the annual 'clan charity week'. These opportunities help pupils to understand how they can have a positive impact on society.

47. Pupils begin to learn about the difference between right and wrong as soon as they join the school. Pupils are supported to understand how their actions can have a positive or negative impact on other people. They are helped to make the right decision and, where necessary, to make things better when they have made the wrong choice. Through the PSHE curriculum, pupils learn about laws and the justice system. They learn that rights are balanced with responsibilities.

48. In the early years, staff promote the development of children's social skills well. For example, daily snack time is used as an opportunity for children to practise sharing with others alongside asking for and accepting food politely. Children have weekly woodland lessons where they learn to work with others co-operatively, to keep themselves safe and to use a range of tools. Children learn about people who help us, including doctors, nurses and the emergency services.

49. The school's careers programme is well developed. It follows the Gatsby benchmarks, which provide a framework for careers education. Pupils receive impartial advice and guidance, including mock interviews, alongside work experience opportunities. Monthly 'careers and cake' sessions provide opportunities for pupils to hear about different careers from a range of speakers. The careers programme helps pupils to be prepared for their next steps when they leave the school.

50. Economic education is taught effectively. Children begin to learn about the concepts of buying and spending in the early years through role-play activities. Pupils gradually learn more about money in

mathematics as they move through the school. Through the PSHE curriculum, pupils are taught about key issues such as budgeting, saving and taxes. This provides them with useful knowledge and understanding in readiness for their adult lives.

Safeguarding

51. Leaders give safeguarding a high priority. As a result, the school has a positive and robust safeguarding culture. Leaders put suitable safeguarding systems in place. Governors check the implementation of procedures regularly to assure themselves that safeguarding practice is effective.

52. New staff receive thorough training about safeguarding as part of their induction when they join the school. All staff receive regular ongoing training so that they have up-to-date knowledge about, and understanding of, statutory guidance. Staff understand that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. They are vigilant and report any concerns promptly.

53. Safeguarding leaders receive regular training for their roles. They have good knowledge and understanding of current statutory guidance and local processes. Leaders respond promptly and appropriately to concerns that are raised. They work with other agencies, such as children's social care and the police, as necessary, to protect pupils.

54. Leaders put suitable arrangements in place to manage low-level concerns and allegations about adults. Staff know what low-level concerns are and the importance of reporting them, including self-reporting. Leaders respond appropriately to concerns that are raised. They seek and act on advice from the local authority, where necessary.

55. The school has robust arrangements for internet filtering and monitoring. Leaders check regularly that systems are working properly. They respond promptly, taking effective action, when issues are raised.

56. Pupils are taught about safety, including online safety, through PSHE and other aspects of the curriculum. For example, pre-prep and prep pupils learn about safe use of tools during their woodland sessions. Pupils learn about the potential risks associated with using the internet. They learn about ways to keep themselves safe and the actions to take if they are ever worried or concerned.

57. Leaders are alert and reflective. When incidents occur, they are investigated fully, using external specialists, where appropriate. Leaders use such investigations to learn lessons in order to improve processes and procedures going forward.

58. The school's processes for the safer recruitment of staff are robust. Leaders have good knowledge and understanding of current guidance and requirements. All required checks are carried out in a timely fashion before anyone begins work at the school. The school's single central record of pre-appointment (SCR) checks is well maintained and meets requirements.

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School details

School	Abbot's Hill School
Department for Education number	919/6000
Registered early years number	490982
Registered charity number	1064758
Address	Abbot's Hill School Bunkers Lane Hemel Hempstead Hertfordshire HP3 8RP
Phone number	01442 240333
Email address	head@abbotshill.herts.sch.uk
Website	www.abbotshill.herts.sch.uk
Proprietor	The Mill Hill School Foundation
Chair	Mr Elliot Lipton
Headteacher	Mrs Sharon Schanschieff
Age range	4 to 16
Number of pupils	271
Date of previous inspection	7 to 9 November 2023

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Information about the school

59. Abbot's Hill School is a co-educational day school in Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire. The school consists of a pre-prep school, a prep school and a senior school on a single site. The school, which is a charitable trust and part of the Mill Hill Education Group, is overseen by a board of governors. The school became co-educational in September 2025 when it began to admit male pupils.

60. There are five children in the early years, taught in one Reception class. There is also a separate early years setting, which is registered with Ofsted and which provides for children from six months to four years.

61. The school has identified 109 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. A very small proportion of pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan.

62. The school has identified 42 pupils as speaking English as an additional language.

63. The school states it aims to ensure that every pupil leaves school happy, confident and well equipped to lead a purposeful and fulfilling life. Through an ambitious and inclusive education, strong pastoral provision and a rich range of academic and co-curricular opportunities, the school aims to develop pupils who know themselves, understand and respect others, demonstrate strength of character and are prepared to make a positive and lasting contribution to the wider world.

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Inspection details

Inspection dates	6 to 8 October 2026

64. A team of four inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

65. Inspection activities included:

- observation of lessons, some in conjunction with school leaders
- observation of registration periods
- observation of a sample of extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection
- discussions with the chair of the proprietorial body
- 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 including with staff and pupils
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

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

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- 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.
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