

School inspection report

18 to 20 November 2025

Abbey Gate College

Saighton Grange

Saighton

Chester

CH3 6EN

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 have a clear vision for the school's continuous development, based on the three pillars of self, service and sustainability. Leaders are well supported by governors, who provide guidance and challenge. Governors assure themselves that leaders fulfil their responsibilities effectively. Consequently, the requirements of the Standards are met.
2. Leaders have created a curriculum that is broad and meets pupils' different needs and aptitudes. Teachers are knowledgeable, know their pupils well and use a range of activities, resources and feedback to help pupils learn effectively. They support pupils with any additional needs, including personalised activities and support. Leaders monitor pupils' performance and address any identified issues promptly.
3. The personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) curriculum, together with the co-curricular programme and carefully considered assemblies provide a framework to support pupils' self-esteem and resilience. Staff, especially those in tutor roles, develop positive relationships with pupils and build confidence. However, in the senior school, not all form time is used effectively.
4. Leaders actively seek to include parents and pupils in the self-evaluation process through regular surveys and open dialogue with parents so that any concerns are addressed promptly. End-of-year reports are detailed and informative, but currently there is no formal reporting to parents about their child's progress in PSHE and relationships and sex education (RSE). In these subjects, assessment of pupils' knowledge and understanding is not consistent.
5. Pupils demonstrate respect for, and are accepting of, others. Consequently, behaviour is good and bullying is rare. The programme of physical activities supports pupils' physical and mental wellbeing.
6. The school fosters pupils' social responsibility by embedding service into school life through successful and enterprising charitable, partnership and community initiatives.
7. Governors and leaders prioritise effective operational rigour through well-developed routines that ensure effective oversight of pupils' safety and wellbeing. Systems are successfully implemented, with detailed logs, clearly defined staff responsibilities and vigilant monitoring.
8. Safeguarding arrangements are effective and in line with current statutory requirements. The school responds effectively to any safeguarding concerns that arise.

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, in the senior school, tutors consistently use form time effectively to support pupils' personal development
- ensure that pupils' attainment in PSHE and RSE is assessed effectively and reported to parents to ensure pupils' progress, inform curriculum planning and give parents assurance of their child's progress.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

9. Governors and leaders communicate the ethos of the school effectively and promote the importance of the school's three pillars of self, service and sustainability consistently, such that they are embedded into the daily lives of the pupils.
10. The governing body is well informed. Governors visit the senior, infant and junior school sites regularly and this informs their effective oversight of school policies, procedures and pupils' wellbeing. They receive regular reports from leaders and provide challenge and support, where needed, to ensure that all Standards are met.
11. Robust self-evaluation is integral to leaders' approach to strategic development. It informs the development plan, the priorities of which are aligned to the school's aims and values. Leaders seek the views of pupils and parents through regular surveys, which are integral in shaping developments.
12. Leaders actively promote the wellbeing of pupils, as evidenced by their thoughtful decisions and actions, such as the development of linking house points to the school's giving to local and national charities. In analysing data, they respond appropriately, for example changing spelling and phonics schemes to meet the needs of pupils in the infant and junior school.
13. Governors and leaders use both internal and external audits to assure themselves that leaders have suitable knowledge and skills to fulfil their roles well. Leaders maintain suitable links with external agencies. They inform the local authority of any pupils whose absenteeism raises concerns or who join or leave the school at non-standard transition points. Leaders provide the relevant local authority with the required information relating to pupils who have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan), including that related to funding, on an annual basis.
14. Information is provided as required by statutory guidance and is up to date on the website. Reports to parents are detailed and informative, but do not contain information about progress in PSHE and RSE.
15. Leaders implement risk management arrangements, including those for premises, welfare and safeguarding, to promote pupils' safety both within the school and on educational visits. Staff are sufficiently trained to assess risks and they understand how to mitigate them. There is a suitable accessibility plan in place that meets the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.
16. Leaders effectively implement a suitable written complaints policy and keep an appropriate log of any complaints received. They promote open dialogue with parents and address any concerns raised in an appropriate and timely manner.

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

17. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

18. The curriculum is broad, balanced and effectively planned to meet the needs of pupils. From the early years, teachers provide clear details about the content, concepts and skills that pupils are expected to learn. Leaders carefully plan to develop pupils' literacy, numeracy and communication and also offer a wide range of physical, creative and artistic opportunities. Scientific and technological understanding is effectively delivered through science, computing and design technology lessons. In the infant and junior school, lessons are enriched with engaging cross-curricular projects and whole-school activity days, for example, linking learning about the World Wars across art, history and geography. The PSHE project undertaken by pupils in Year 8, on sustainability awareness, encourages pupils to think critically. These critical thinking skills are further developed in the sixth form, where some pupils successfully undertake the Extended Project Qualification (EPQ).
19. Teaching methods are effective, ensuring that pupils acquire knowledge and skills and demonstrate good progress. Teaching is well paced and composed, resulting in lessons that are purposeful and calm, enabling pupils to make rapid progress, particularly in reading and writing in the infant and junior school. Clear and established routines, well known to pupils, are consistently applied. This enables skills to be taught successfully in ways that are creative and inspiring and maintain pupils' interest. Pupils benefit from teachers' subject knowledge and the use of a variety of resources and activities, including skilful questioning. Teachers rigorously monitor pupils' understanding so that misconceptions are quickly addressed. Leaders provide a structured approach that ensures teachers consistently deliver detailed feedback to pupils. As pupils grow older, there is an increasing emphasis on taking responsibility for their learning, particularly in reflecting on their own work by using 'progress and response' forms.
20. Leaders monitor the effectiveness of teaching and learning through a range of activities, including lesson observations, learning walks, scrutiny of pupils' work and detailed assessment of results. Leaders analyse assessment information to monitor pupils' achievements. Patterns are identified across year groups and curriculum areas. As a result, teachers are challenged to adopt appropriate methods of support to ensure pupils' progress. Pupils achieve good standards at GCSE and A level, making appropriate progress from their starting points. Outcomes are positive, with pupils securing places at their chosen universities or apprenticeship programmes.
21. Teachers hold high expectations for the quality of work produced by pupils. Pupils respond with self-motivation and consistent effort. They discuss ideas and concepts in pairs and small groups, remaining focused on the tasks they undertake. Pupils make good progress and demonstrate secure understanding through structured activities, peer discussion and redrafting. They display positive behaviours and attitudes, settling quickly to work and showing enthusiasm for learning, with a strong desire to achieve well.
22. Leaders provide continuing professional development and training to ensure teachers meet the needs of pupils. Pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) are identified on arrival and receive targeted support, either individually or within the classroom, as required. Consequently, pupils who speak EAL make good progress in their spoken English.
23. Leaders maintain a comprehensive, structured register of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), as well as those with higher prior attainment. Pupils who have SEND are

successfully supported through small-group and one-to-one interventions. In the infant and junior school, designated teaching assistants provide additional support. All pupils who have SEND have an individual learning plan, the details of which are shared with teachers. Pupils are well supported by the learning enrichment department and are respected and understood by their peers. Pupils who have SEND make good progress from their starting points.

24. Leaders set clear expectations for the learning and development of children in the early years and provide high-quality stimuli to develop communication skills. Staff ensure positive and nurturing interactions with children, supporting their progress. Teachers consistently model appropriate spoken English and encourage children to respond politely and confidently, thereby strengthening their communication and language skills. Opportunities for writing are provided, with close attention given to the development of fine motor skills. Children develop early writing skills and enjoy practising their phonics sounds in response to characters in stories and animal characteristics.
25. The comprehensive and broad co-curricular programme enriches pupils' experiences and skill development. It successfully fosters wide participation and enables pupils to pursue new interests. Simultaneously, the programme develops a range of skills and facilitates elite pupil attainment, including competitive success in sporting fixtures for older pupils. Membership of the successful chapel choir, which performs at Chester Cathedral, or participation in one of the whole-school annual drama productions, develop pupils' personal skills, such as performing and public speaking.

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

26. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

27. The school's ethos, rooted in the three pillars, permeates school culture and is widely reflected across both curricular and co-curricular activities. Pupils' self-knowledge and self-awareness are evident in their genuine interest in learning and their motivation to improve through a deeper understanding of themselves.
28. Leaders actively promote pupils' personal development through a comprehensive PSHE curriculum, enriched by theme days, guest speakers, workshops and an assembly programme aligned with national events. Leaders monitor the effectiveness of PSHE through learning walks, some peer assessment, and pupil attitude surveys, ensuring that the content remains relevant and responsive to pupils' needs. As a result, pupils develop a clear understanding of diversity, including race and sexual orientation, and are taught to respect and value individual differences. Leaders have ensured that PSHE lessons are appropriately scheduled and delivered by suitably trained staff. However, the twice-daily form tutor sessions in the senior school are not always used to support pupils' personal development as effectively as possible, because not all form tutors consistently deliver the structured programme provided by senior leaders.
29. The RSE curriculum is age appropriate and incorporates pupil input, particularly in sensitive areas, thereby enhancing its relevance and impact. Pupils acquire the knowledge and awareness necessary to make informed decisions about their wellbeing and relationships. They learn to identify healthy and unhealthy relationship dynamics. Assemblies and follow-up sessions address issues such as misogyny and emphasise the importance of challenging inappropriate behaviour. The school communicates effectively with parents about the content of RSE and PSHE lessons, although pupils' progress in these areas is not formally reported.
30. The curriculum supports the development of pupils' spiritual and moral understanding. Activities in the infant and junior school, such as yoga, outdoor learning and creative enrichment, foster spiritual and moral growth, resilience and a sense of purpose. In the senior school, spiritual development is promoted through subject-specific content, such as art and music, where appreciation of the non-material aspects of life is explored. In addition, assemblies and whole-school events, such as Founders' Day and the Christmas service at Chester Cathedral, contribute to pupils' spiritual awareness.
31. Warm, respectful and nurturing relationships between staff and pupils positively influence behaviour and moral development. The welcoming approach of form tutors exemplifies the effort made to foster a sense of belonging. Correct behaviour is consistently maintained through clear routines, and a restorative approach is embedded from the early years onwards. Pupils are encouraged to reflect on their actions, fostering empathy, self-awareness and emotional maturity. Staff promote these characteristics through tailored strategies such as 'think sheets', 'kind hands' and reflective conversations. These practices create a calm, inclusive environment where relationships thrive.
32. Anti-bullying strategies are well embedded. Behaviour and bullying logs are meticulously maintained and used to identify trends and inform timely interventions. Effective and visible supervision enhances pupils' sense of safety and belonging. Pupils take on responsibilities such as being playground leaders and sports captains, actively supporting one another. They respond positively to

guidance, demonstrate high levels of tolerance and develop the confidence and skills to contribute meaningfully to the school community.

33. The physical education (PE) curriculum is rich, varied and well resourced, resulting in the acquisition of advanced skills for many pupils. Physical wellbeing is promoted through the high rate of participation in sport. Pupils benefit from a well-developed programme that balances academic learning with a broad range of enriching opportunities.
34. Leadership ensures that staff provide children in the early years with many opportunities to develop fine motor skills, such as cutting out shapes and practising writing. Gross motor skills are developed through extensive play equipment in dedicated areas of the school playground. Children show a growing understanding of self-care, for example, through learning how to cross the road safely. They demonstrate increasing confidence as they develop and refine new and existing skills.
35. Leaders ensure that the school premises are well maintained. Health and safety checks are conducted regularly by trained staff and external providers. Staff receive training in emergency procedures and hazard management. Fire evacuation drills are routinely carried out, with actions from fire risk assessments implemented. Fire safety equipment is tested regularly and records are diligently maintained.
36. The medical needs of pupils are met through robust first aid systems, training and a culture of care. All early years staff are trained in paediatric first aid. Medicines are securely stored and detailed records are maintained for all first aid and medication administration. Parents are promptly informed of any incidents. Trained mental health first aiders provide effective support when required.
37. A senior leader serves as attendance champion, providing clear leadership and accountability. Daily attendance reports enable effective monitoring. Leaders work proactively with families to support pupils with low attendance, and phased returns have successfully re-engaged some school refusers. The admission register is accurate and up to date, reflecting strong record-keeping practices.

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

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

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

39. Leaders ensure that pupils' human, social and economic wellbeing is actively promoted through the school's three core pillars: self, service and sustainability. These pillars encourage pupils to engage with key concepts, challenge themselves, and develop both character and skills. The PSHE curriculum, complemented by wider school experiences, engages pupils meaningfully in topics essential to their future, including economic education, mental health, online safety and careers.
40. The theme of respect for others is embedded within the curriculum, contributing to an inclusive and caring school community. For example, in Year 10, the PSHE programme explores themes of inclusion, exclusion and diversity, with a particular focus on dismantling barriers related to gender and race. The establishment of a neurodiverse pupil group has fostered open dialogue between pupils and staff about individual needs and identities. Such dialogue reinforces the importance of mutual respect across the school community.
41. Leaders ensure that British values are interwoven throughout the PSHE curriculum and reinforced across other subject areas and wider school life, in line with curriculum policy, which emphasises a balanced perspective on political issues. Complex but essential topics are addressed with sensitivity and purpose. For instance, English lessons integrate discussions on racism through literature and modern foreign language lessons address themes such as the gender pay gap and racism, demonstrating a strong commitment to socially relevant education.
42. Economic education is carefully designed to equip pupils with relevant financial knowledge and skills. The spiral curriculum ensures progressive development in areas such as debt management, banking, interest rates and loans, supported by resources from commercial banking institutions. Pupils also develop transferable skills of teamwork, communication and reflection. Through enterprise and 'dragon's den' activities, they engage positively with the wider world. Leaders have directly linked house points to donations to local and national charities, emphasising the 'service' aspect of the school's ethos and further developing pupils' understanding of financial responsibility. In the infant and junior school, PSHE topics such as decision-making in relation to money enable pupils to increase their financial awareness as they grow older.
43. Cultural development is embedded across subjects, enabling pupils to deepen their understanding of diversity, differences in people and respectful relationships. Assemblies and discussions model high levels of tolerance and appreciation of different cultures, such as celebrating Diwali and the Lunar New Year. Participation in the diversity club, debating club and overseas trips further enriches pupils' cultural awareness. Social development is evident in cross-age friendships, inclusive playtimes and purposeful activities. The house system and celebration assemblies nurture confidence, teamwork and resilience.
44. The school has cultivated a strong emphasis on pupils' responsibility to society through the concept of service. Pupils engage in a wide range of service activities within the school and wider community, including charitable initiatives through the house system, partnership activities with local schools, such as the annual sustainability conference, and volunteering at local care homes. As a result, pupils view service to others as a core aspect of school life, fostering a strong sense of social responsibility. Democratic values are modelled through processes such as voting for house charities. House charity days provide opportunities for pupils to raise funds and awareness, embedding civic

engagement into the fabric of school life. Consequently, pupils' contributions to society are evident in their growing social awareness.

45. Pupils take on meaningful roles within the school and wider community, helping them to develop confidence and essential life skills. Enterprise initiatives equip pupils to respond positively to challenges. For example, older pupils lead science club sessions for younger pupils, resulting in the school's qualification for a national quadcopter competition, which involved using drones to monitor local wildlife. Personal skill development is further enhanced in the sixth form, where pupils are encouraged to apply for leadership roles and receive expert leadership training.
46. Careers education is well embedded through a comprehensive curriculum from Year 7, culminating in effective preparation for diverse destinations including degrees, apprenticeships and entrepreneurial ventures. Pupils receive impartial, accurate guidance and develop strong social and economic competencies through community involvement and active alumni engagement. As a result, pupils demonstrate high aspirations and enthusiasm for their future education and career paths.
47. The range of activities and equipment provided by leaders, together with high-quality interactions with staff, support the social development of children in the early years. Teachers arrange lessons and activities that emphasise collaboration, teamwork and communication. Children learn about different people, for example through simple vocabulary in different languages and by marking a variety of religious festivals in song and dance. They understand the importance of sharing and taking turns and they develop an awareness of table manners at mealtimes. As a result, children's skills in talking and listening to each other develop well and they engage in polite, meaningful conversations about topics that matter to them. Warm and nurturing relationships enable children to grow in confidence with one another and with adults.

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

48. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

49. Governors monitor safeguarding carefully through regular contact with the pastoral and safeguarding teams. They check records and review cases to ensure effective and rigorous practice. Well-considered measures are taken to manage identified risks associated with safeguarding needs, such as mental health vulnerabilities. The school's safeguarding policy is up to date and records are kept in line with statutory requirements.
50. Suitable arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils and protect them from harm. Leaders promote a culture of awareness and openness, which encourages pupils and staff to readily discuss concerns.
51. Staff with designated safeguarding responsibilities meet regularly with the safeguarding governor to discuss issues, analyse trends and review practice, including within the early years.
52. Leaders ensure that all staff, governors and volunteers receive appropriate safeguarding training as they join the school, including 'Prevent' duty training. All staff receive regular update training, and their knowledge and understanding are assessed by leaders with responsibility for safeguarding. Leaders ensure that staff understand how to recognise and report safeguarding issues, including low-level concerns about adults and how to escalate them externally, if necessary.
53. Any reported safeguarding concerns are acted upon promptly and, when incidents occur, they are addressed swiftly and appropriately. The safeguarding team works effectively with external agencies, as the need arises.
54. Pupils are taught to keep themselves safe, including when using the internet. Online safety is taken seriously and taught effectively in PSHE and computing lessons. Pupils receive regular reminders and parents are supported through visiting speakers and regular school communications. Suitable internet monitoring and filtering systems are in place. These are tested appropriately and any issues are dealt with quickly and appropriately. Leaders ensure that pupils are aware of safety protocols, such as recognising visitors and their identification lanyards. Staff are readily available for pupils to talk to and pupils are confident to approach or contact adults if they have concerns. Pupils from Year 5 upwards can use an online anonymous reporting system, if they wish.
55. The single central record of appointments (SCR) contains accurate details of all necessary recruitment checks carried out before staff, volunteers and governors join the school. Leaders and governors oversee the recruitment process and the SCR as part of monitoring the school's arrangements to ensure consistently effective practice. Leaders receive appropriate training in safer recruitment.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

56. All the relevant Standards are met.

School details

School	Abbey Gate College
Department for Education number	896/6018
Registered charity number	273586
Address	Abbey Gate College Saighton Grange Saighton Chester Cheshire CH3 6EN
Phone number	01244 332077
Email address	admin@abbeygatecollege.co.uk
Website	www.abbeygatecollege.co.uk
Proprietor	Deeside House Educational Trust
Chair	Mr Andrew Grime
Headteacher	Mr Craig Jenkinson
Age range	4 to 18
Number of pupils	420
Date of previous inspection	26 to 29 April 2022

Information about the school

57. Abbey Gate College is an independent, co-educational day school located on the outskirts of Chester. It was founded in 1977 and consists of three sections: infant and junior, including the early years foundation stage (EYFS), for pupils aged 4 to 11 years; senior, for pupils aged 11 to 16 years; and a sixth form. The senior and sixth-form pupils occupy Saignton Grange, and the infant and junior school is approximately two miles away, in Aldford. The board of governors oversees all sections of the school.
58. There are 13 children in the early years in one Reception class.
59. The school has identified 131 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. A small number of pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan.
60. The school has identified English as an additional language for 18 pupils.
61. The school states its aims are to enable pupils to become the best they can be and to have the self-confidence to go forward into the changeable world with courage and compassion, through focusing on pupils' development of themselves and service to others within a safe, caring community in a sustainable environment.

Inspection details

Inspection dates	18 to 20 November 2025
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62. A team of six inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

63. Inspection activities included:

- observation of lessons, some in conjunction with school leaders
- observation of registration periods and assemblies
- observation of a sample of co-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.

64. 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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For more information, please visit isi.net