



INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

**ABBAY GATE SCHOOL
STANDARD INSPECTION**

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

Abbey Gate School

Full Name of School	Abbey Gate School		
DfE Number	896/6000		
Address	Abbey Gate School Clare Avenue Hoole Chester Cheshire CH2 3HR		
Telephone Number	01244 319649		
Email Address	abbeygateschool.t21@btinternet.com		
Head Teacher	Mrs Susan Fisher		
Chair of Governors	Mrs P Morris		
Age Range	3 to 11		
Total Number of Pupils	44		
Gender of Pupils	Mixed (28 boys; 16 girls)		
Numbers by Age	3-5 (EYFS):	10	5-11: 34
Number of Day Pupils	Total:	44	
EYFS Gender	Mixed		
Inspection dates	21 Sep 2010 to 22 Sep 2010 18 Oct 2010 to 20 Oct 2010		

PREFACE

This inspection report follows the STANDARD *ISI schedule*. The inspection consists of two parts: an INITIAL two-day inspection of regulatory requirements followed by a three-day FINAL (team) inspection of the school's broader educational provision. The previous ISI inspection was in September 2004.

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is the body approved by the Government for the purpose of inspecting schools belonging to the Independent Schools Council (ISC) Associations and reporting on compliance with the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010*. The range of these Regulations is as follows.

- (a) Quality of education provided (curriculum)
- (b) Quality of education provided (teaching)
- (c) Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils
- (d) Welfare, health and safety of pupils
- (e) Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors
- (f) Premises and accommodation
- (g) Provision of information
- (h) Manner in which complaints are to be handled

*These Standards Regulations replace those first introduced on 1 September 2003.

Legislation additional to Part 3, Welfare, health and safety of pupils, is as follows.

- (i) The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA).
- (ii) Race, gender and sexual discrimination legislation.
- (iii) Corporal punishment.

The inspection was also carried out under the arrangements of the ISC Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership.

ISI is also approved to inspect the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), which was introduced in September 2008 and applies to all children in England from birth to 31st August following their fifth birthday. This report evaluates the extent to which the setting fulfils the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework published by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and follows the requirements of the Childcare Act 2006 as subsequently amended

The inspection of the school is from an educational perspective and provides limited inspection of other aspects, though inspectors will comment on any significant hazards or problems they encounter which have an adverse impact on children. The inspection does not include:

- (i) an exhaustive health and safety audit
- (ii) an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features
- (iii) an investigation of the financial viability of the school or its accounting procedures
- (iv) an in-depth investigation of the school's compliance with employment law.

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1. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

- 1.1 Abbey Gate School was founded in 1910 in a building adjacent to Chester Cathedral and has recently celebrated its centenary. The school has relocated several times, the most recent move being in 2006. It now occupies a purpose-built school building in the Chester suburb of Hoole, whilst still maintaining its strong links with the cathedral. When opened, the school was owned by a family but it is now a limited company and administered by a board of governors. The head teacher is responsible for its day-to-day running.
- 1.2 The school has on roll forty-four pupils between the ages of three and eleven. Six of these attend part-time in the co-educational Nursery and another four are in the Reception class, all part of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). Pupils are almost all successful in obtaining places at their first choice of maintained or independent senior schools.
- 1.3 Results in national tests at the ages of seven and of eleven indicate that the ability profile of the school is above the national average for maintained primary schools. Three pupils have English as an additional language and three pupils have been identified as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD). The pupils are drawn from business and professional families from the local Chester community and surrounding area. A small number come from non-European cultures and some from European backgrounds.
- 1.4 The school aims to provide a lively, stimulating environment that enables pupils to acquire and apply a broad range of knowledge and skills, and to develop their confidence and self-esteem. It seeks to encourage independence, enjoyment and a commitment to learning so that pupils develop enquiring minds and a desire to learn. It also strives to promote spiritual, moral and cultural values and a sense of identity whilst encouraging a respect for the wider community.
- 1.5 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school.

2. THE SUCCESS OF THE SCHOOL

2.(a) Main findings

- 2.1 Pupils at Abbey Gate, including those in the EYFS, attain well and make excellent progress in their learning. Pupils achieve so well because their learning is firmly grounded in highly effective teaching. Their overall success is promoted further by their positive attitudes and their excellent relationships with one another. Mutual respect and trust pervade the school, and enable it to fulfil its aim to provide a safe and stimulating environment where all pupils can reach their maximum potential whatever their starting point. The curriculum is broad and includes all the required educational experiences, and the good extra-curricular provision builds on the school's objectives to enable pupils to experience new activities and develop new skills.
- 2.2 Pastoral care is excellent and pupils' welfare, health and safety are assured. Pupils are courteous to visitors and treat their peers and staff with great respect. Their care for one another is embedded in all aspects of school life. Pupils demonstrate high levels of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Their awareness of those less fortunate than themselves shows in their positive approach to charitable giving. The pupils' responses to pre-inspection questionnaires were overwhelmingly positive about the school. It is a school where smiles and laughter are a regular part of school life.
- 2.3 Governance, leadership and management are good. Since the last inspection they have responded well to the need to expand the governing body to include members not involved with the day-to-day running of the school. The governors have guided the school's success and strategic development well, and exercise effective oversight. The successful move to new premises has considerably enhanced facilities. Governors are committed to the academic progress and personal development of the pupil, and have responded well to the recommendations of the previous report to improve the library and extend information and communication technology (ICT) provision. The governors offer strong support for the head teacher, who provides excellent day-to-day guidance for staff. Currently, the role of the subject co-ordinators is unclear and monitoring of pupils' progress is not fully consistent. The school promotes strong links with its parents. In their responses to the pre-inspection questionnaires, parents were extremely positive about all aspects of school life, particularly teaching, pastoral care and the open communication with the school.

2.(b) Action points

(i) Compliance with regulatory requirements

(The range of the Independent School Standards Regulations is given in the Preface)

- 2.4 At the time of the initial visit, the school met all the requirements of the Independent School Standards Regulations 2010.

(ii) Recommendations for further improvement

- 2.5 The school is advised to make the following improvements.

1. Introduce a formal staff appraisal system which identifies areas for staff professional development linked to the needs of the school.
2. Develop further a system for continuous assessment and individual pupil tracking in order to monitor progress, including those children in the EYFS.
3. Develop the role of the curriculum co-ordinators to allow for greater responsibility for monitoring the delivery of their subject across the key stages.
4. In the EYFS, enhance provision for outdoor play to facilitate its use in all weathers.

3. THE QUALITY OF ACADEMIC AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS

3.(a) The quality of the pupils' achievements and their learning, attitudes and skills

- 3.1 The quality of the pupils' achievements and of their learning, attitudes and skills is excellent. Their success in academic work fulfils the school's aims of developing pupils' talents and enables pupils to realise their own potential at their own rate within an environment in which they are happy and secure. Results in national tests at the age of seven, over the last three years for which comparative data is available, have been high, and at the age of eleven have been excellent, when compared with the national average for maintained primary schools. At all stages of the school, pupils show high levels of knowledge and understanding, and well-developed skills. The majority gain entry to senior schools of their choice. The school meets fully its aims to develop enjoyment and commitment to learning.
- 3.2 Pupils make excellent progress in their learning over time in relation to their ability profile, which is above the national average. They develop their knowledge, understanding and skills effectively supported by a broad curriculum. From an early age they reason well and think for themselves, as observed in the many discussions that take place during lessons. Throughout the school pupils have excellent literacy and numeracy skills. Their reading is particularly strong, and they read with understanding. They are articulate and express themselves with confidence, both orally and in their written work. Evidence of this was seen in the Harvest Festival where pupils delivered readings and in their own poetry, composed with passion. Overall, pupils show a strong grasp of mathematical concepts and apply these effectively, especially when problem solving, as seen in a Year 3 lesson where they used their individual strategies to find answers in mental mathematics activities. ICT skills are well developed and used effectively, both in ICT lessons and across other subjects, as observed in a history lesson where pupils researched life on the Mary Rose.
- 3.3 Throughout, the majority of pupils are successful in music and drama, and the school has an inclusive approach in these areas. Pupils are often successful in sports competitions against similar schools, and in speech, drama and music festivals. Pupils' achievement in art and design technology is less apparent, as there are limited opportunities in the curriculum.
- 3.4 Pupils have excellent attitudes to learning and this contributes to their successful achievement. Overall, they benefit from a stimulating environment where learning is consistently nurtured and they know that their efforts are appreciated. Pupils co-operate extremely well; they work enthusiastically in pairs and in groups, both in and out of the classroom.

3.(b) The contribution of curricular and extra-curricular provision (including community links of benefit to pupils)

- 3.5 Curriculum provision is good. The curriculum is appropriate and broad, and is supplemented by an effective range of extra-curricular activities. It allows pupils to experience the requisite areas of learning, while supporting the school's aims in providing a lively and stimulating environment.
- 3.6 Curriculum planning has developed since the last inspection, as is evident from the detailed and useful schemes of work for each subject, and it meets the needs of

pupils of all ages and abilities. Emphasis is placed on English and mathematics, both in their allotted share of the timetable and in their early delivery within the school day. Personal, social and health education is embedded in the curriculum and is taught through a number of subjects, for example science and geography, and in assemblies. ICT skills are also acquired across the curriculum as well as in dedicated lessons. Music and drama of high quality allow many opportunities for creative expression but there is less scope for pupils' involvement in art and design technology. There is suitable provision for games.

- 3.7 Small class sizes and the understanding of the needs of individual pupils ensure a good standard of support for pupils with LDD. These pupils are identified early and their needs appropriately addressed; where necessary, expert one-to-one help is given. A programme specifically addressing the needs of the most able pupils has not yet been developed.
- 3.8 Extra-curricular provision is good, building on the school's objectives to enable pupils to experience new activities and develop new skills. Over the year pupils benefit from a range of after-school clubs and are encouraged and supported in their participation in a number of local festivals and competitions, allowing musicians, singers and actors to widen their horizons and gain in confidence.
- 3.9 The school makes full use of its location to enhance the taught curriculum through an array of visits linked to class work. These include trips to Chester as a resource, with its cathedral, zoo and Roman heritage, and others further afield. In Years 1 and 2 pupils are, for example, taken to a bird sanctuary to investigate nature and to a science centre in Wrexham to explore technology. Productive links have been forged locally with a church and have been maintained with the cathedral, from which pupils benefit.

3.(c) The contribution of teaching

- 3.10 Teaching is good throughout the school and a significant proportion is excellent. It successfully promotes the school's aims to develop in pupils an enjoyment of and commitment to learning, and to nurture enquiring minds.
- 3.11 Teachers have thorough subject knowledge; and in the best lessons have clearly planned objectives that pupils are encouraged to achieve through focused questioning, high expectations and the setting of attainable challenges. In such lessons rapid progress is made, co-operative and independent learning is encouraged and a brisk pace fosters involvement. Teachers are able to spend significant amounts of time with individual pupils in small classes and the children themselves acknowledge the positive effect that this has on their learning. On occasion, the style of teaching combined with a lack of pace restricts pupils' opportunities for interacting with each other or being challenged at their own level, learning objectives are not clear and there is heavy reliance on worksheets.
- 3.12 In all lessons, strong relationships between teachers and pupils are evident and are a significant factor in pupils' successful outcomes. Classroom behaviour is generally of a high standard and the effort and application of pupils are clearly appreciated by staff. Resources are appropriate and where those such as interactive whiteboards have been introduced, pupils benefit from the significant use made of them.
- 3.13 There is a clear, whole-school marking policy although it is not used consistently across subjects and year groups. Emphasis is placed on the value of discussing marked work with each pupil. The best written comments seen both indicated the

standard reached and suggested ways to improve. Pupils reported that they find the handing back of marked work useful and that they have a very good idea of how well they are doing.

- 3.14 Within classes there is much information helping teachers to assess how well pupils are performing: there is not yet an over-arching system to pull that information together to enable effective individual tracking and monitoring. This has been identified as an area for development by the school and a model has been introduced in some year groups.

4. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

4.(a) The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

- 4.1 The development of pupils as individuals during their time at the school is outstanding. It is supported by positive relationships at all levels and amongst all members of the community: this is a school in which everyone cares about each other. The school lives out the principles of its Christian foundation and succeeds in its aims of creating an ethos of trust, respect and care.
- 4.2 Pupils demonstrate a spiritual awareness which is reinforced both by the school's ethos and its links with the cathedral and local parish church. Pupils are confident and respectful of others. The religious education programme promotes awareness and understanding of faiths other than Christianity and daily assemblies build on this. At the Harvest Festival in church, pupils clearly demonstrated their spiritual understanding in the prayers that they had written and in their singing worship.
- 4.3 Pupils' moral sense is keen. In discussion they were clear about the distinction between right and wrong but also demonstrated awareness of situations that might not be clear cut. Older pupils are always happy to help younger ones and understand why they are asked to take responsibility for them. Pupils know that many in the world are less fortunate than they are and enthusiastically support the charitable fund-raising activities that regularly take place. In the summer term a considerable sum was raised for three separate charities.
- 4.4 The social development of pupils is excellent. They feel valued and respected, and in turn value and respect others. All Year 6 pupils are given the opportunity to be prefects, a responsibility they take seriously. The recently re-invigorated school council is seen by pupils as a worthwhile forum that will take ideas forward, and suggestions are readily made to representatives.
- 4.5 The quality of cultural development is good. In place of a formal programme to promote cultural awareness, informal opportunities, such as inviting parents into the school to talk to pupils about their cultures, are taken. These, in combination with assemblies and class work subject topics, successfully raise awareness of different cultural strands and celebrate them.

4.(b) The contribution of arrangements for welfare, health and safety

- 4.6 Pupils are well cared for and say that they have an adult to turn to should they have a concern. The anti-bullying policy ensures that any issues that arise are dealt with quickly and effectively, and comprehensive arrangements are in place to protect pupils from bullying. Pupils believe that bullying is rare and agree that staff deal with any difficulties quickly and constructively. Pupils behave well in lessons. The school rules are clear and effective. The school has a strong culture of praise, and rewards good behaviour and effort through a variety of methods that include certificates, stars and house points, with successes being celebrated in assemblies.
- 4.7 The child protection policy and procedures are robust, including the appropriate training of staff according to their responsibilities. The staffing recruitment process is rigorous. Health and safety procedures are highly effective, with risk assessments covering all aspects of school life. Fire prevention measures are in order and a fire risk assessment is undertaken regularly. Fire drills are held every term and all alarms are tested appropriately. Two pupils are elected each year to be junior road

safety officers, working with the council to promote road safety awareness in the school.

- 4.8 Registration of pupils is methodical with absence followed up quickly, and the school maintains an appropriate admission register. Suitable medical facilities ensure that pupils' needs are catered for sensitively and effectively. The school has an accessibility plan in place designed to improve the educational provision for those pupils with disabilities and this is in line with the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act. Pupils enjoy the school meals, which are nutritious, although there is a limited choice. They understand the importance of a healthy diet and the need to participate in regular exercise.

5. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

5.(a) The quality of governance

- 5.1 The quality of governance is good. It is clearly defined and promotes carefully the aims and ethos of the school. The governors know the school well and they provide a keen concern for its stability and sustained development.
- 5.2 The school is unusual in having a significant number of staff on the governing body, one of whom is the chair of governors. This has worked well because of the excellent relationships that exist. The school has recognised the need to include on the board of governors a balance of expertise and experience from people not involved with its day-to-day running: consequently the board has now co-opted several new members from outside the school community.
- 5.3 The governors are strongly committed to the school, its pupils and staff, and to its continuing development and success. They are aware of their responsibilities and are determined, through prudent financial planning, to ensure that the school's accommodation, and human and material resources are of a high quality to meet the pupils' educational needs. To this end the school successfully moved to a new site.
- 5.4 The governors maintain a clear overview of pupils' welfare, health and safety, especially on child protection matters and in the maintenance of a centralised staff register that records the recruitment checks undertaken on the appointment of staff. Monitoring of policies and procedures is efficient and thorough.
- 5.5 The governors have responded well to the recommendations of the previous report to improve provision and the facilities for ICT. They are happy to support the many school events as far as practicable. They support the head teacher well.

5.(b) The quality of leadership and management

- 5.6 The school is well led, and management is effective in promoting the school's aims. The head teacher is highly skilled at moulding the staff into a unified team that works with a shared goal of a positive and caring approach towards each individual pupil. This produces an excellent response in the attitudes of pupils towards learning and to school. The head teacher and her senior management team provide the school with clear educational direction. This is reflected in the achievement of the pupils, and in their excellent personal and social skills, enabling them to gain entry to the senior schools of their choice.
- 5.7 The school is efficiently run, with arrangements for the day-to-day management working very well. Policies and procedures have been produced for all aspects of school life and are implemented successfully. Communication within the school works extremely effectively. The administrative and all other support staff provide high quality assistance.
- 5.8 The monitoring of teaching and learning through examining pupils' work is undertaken by the head teacher and she also observes lessons informally for the same purpose. As a result, monitoring of the success of teaching, the curriculum and planning, and the effectiveness of systems, rests mainly on the shoulders of the head teacher, and subject co-ordinators are not able to obtain a full enough

overview to enable them to contribute more effectively to leading and managing the school.

- 5.9 The school development plan is effective and well constructed, but is not closely linked to a rigorous process that uses the information gained from assessments and lesson monitoring to design whole-school professional development for staff. No formal staff appraisal is undertaken.
- 5.10 All staff in the school, teaching and non-teaching, support the personal development and welfare of pupils, so that the school's aim to enable pupils to gain personal skills and confidence and to value others and delight in achievement is well met.
- 5.11 The needs of the school are thoroughly analysed; priorities are set, effectively planned and carried out so that provision for material and human resources and for accommodation is good. An open approach enables staff to participate in decision making and as a result morale is high and a positive ethos evident.

5.(c) The quality of links with parents, carers and guardians

- 5.12 Links between the school and parents are excellent and strongly support the academic and personal development aims of the school. The school maintains many open and varied channels of communication and actively encourages parents to liaise closely with teaching staff and to play a part in the education of their children.
- 5.13 Responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire, although few in number, indicate that parents are overwhelmingly positive and supportive of the school, and are very happy with the education their children receive. They commented favourably on the high standards expected of pupils and the support given to pupils to achieve these. An almost unanimous positive response was given on pastoral matters. A typical response was: "The children behave beautifully. They are polite and very kind and the older children are able to show empathy with the little ones." The inspectors concur with these views.
- 5.14 Parents of pupils and prospective pupils are given access to all relevant information about the school. Two written reports are sent out each year to keep parents informed of their children's attainment and effort in all subjects. These reports are detailed and present a clear picture of pupils' achievements but do not show targets for improvement.
- 5.15 Communication is good and includes an electronic system that enables email and text messages to be sent to parents, providing details of any emergencies and calendar changes, and raising absence enquiries. The termly newsletter highlights events that have taken place as well as successes.
- 5.16 Parents make frequent use of the open door policy and have opportunities to be involved in the life of the school through assemblies and concerts. There is an active parents association which organises events to raise funds for the school. In questionnaire responses, a small number of parents felt that they were not involved enough; however, the inspection team found no evidence to support this.
- 5.17 The school has a clear and appropriate complaints procedure. Parental concerns are heard promptly and treated with care and consideration. The head teacher and teaching staff are visible on site at the beginning and end of every day so that parents can approach them to discuss issues.

What the school should do to improve is given at the beginning of the report in section 2.

6. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE

6.(a) The overall effectiveness of the early years provision – how well the school meets the needs of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage

6.1 The overall effectiveness of the EYFS is good and there is a warm, welcoming family atmosphere. The small numbers in each group enable the staff to know the children very well and their needs are well met through a broad, innovative range of activities. As a result, most children make significant progress in their learning and development from their different starting points. The trained and experienced staff, led by the newly appointed manager, have a clear understanding of children's needs and create a stimulating and colourful environment where children feel valued and safe. Since the last inspection, an additional member of staff has been appointed to the EYFS and the setting has moved to a larger, brighter room that has access to an outside area.

6.(b) The effectiveness of the leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage

6.2 Leadership and management are good. Safeguarding procedures are robust, with efficient and comprehensive policies and risk assessments firmly implemented. Children achieve well, irrespective of background, ability or need, because of the staff's strong commitments to promoting equality. A new initiative in recording children's progress and planning for next steps is developing but is not yet firmly embedded. Adults are properly checked for suitability to work with children, and regular and methodical review of risks ensures a safe environment. The effective use and good management of resources, including those outdoors, lead to successful outcomes for children. The strong links with other agencies further support the setting. Relationships with parents are positive, as reflected in their supportive and appreciative comments. Regular updates to parents and a 'Getting to know you' afternoon are initiatives recently established.

6.(c) The quality of the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage

6.3 The overall provision for learning and development is good. The Nursery and Reception share a bright, stimulating environment conducive to learning, although the use of the outside area is limited during inclement weather because of the lack of cover. Staff relationships with children are positive and supportive. Adults' extensive knowledge is used to good effect in this mixed-age setting, which offers a good balance between adult-led and child-initiated activities. All staff are vigilant in their care and guidance of children, so providing safe, clear routines for them to follow.

6.(d) Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage

- 6.4 Children make outstanding progress in relation to their starting points and abilities. They are well motivated, confident, fully involved and well behaved, as they chatter animatedly to friends and to adults. They respond to school life with great enthusiasm and enjoyment. Children co-operate well in their learning and begin to make choices and decisions. They join enthusiastically in number rhymes, are beginning to recognise and understand numbers to up to ten, and were able to count proficiently in French during registration. They co-operate well, as seen in group activities using the interactive whiteboard when learning to write the letter 'a'. They are eager to contribute and listen to each other's views, and they respond well to adults. They learn to care for each other: relationships at all levels are excellent, and children make friends easily. They respect and trust their teachers. The children feel safe and secure, and understand healthy eating. They are aware of the need to maintain good hygiene and understand about being safe.

Section 2 includes what the Early Years Foundation Stage should do to improve its provision.

INSPECTION EVIDENCE

The inspectors observed lessons, conducted formal interviews with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with senior members of staff and with the chair of governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended registration sessions and assemblies. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined regulatory documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Mrs Linda Donowho

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Mr Martin Bruce

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Mrs Lynda Boden

Early Years Co-ordinating Inspector