

Abbotsford Preparatory School

211 Flixton Road, Urmston, Manchester, Lancashire M41 5PR

Inspection dates

7–9 June 2017

Overall effectiveness	Outstanding
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Outstanding
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Outstanding
Early years provision	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- The headteacher, leaders and the proprietor have ambitious aims for the school’s effectiveness. Their vision has a very positive influence on every area of the school’s work and drives continual improvement.
- Leaders inspire staff, who go about their work with absolute determination and with the highest expectations of what pupils can achieve.
- Pupils make outstanding progress academically, and in the fields of sport and the arts.
- The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding. Teachers and teaching assistants enable pupils to realise their potential and prepare them exceptionally well for the next stage of their education.
- Behaviour is impeccable. The school teaches behaviour for learning and social skills from the very earliest of ages. The school acknowledges that it could provide more opportunities for pupils to develop leadership skills.
- Pupils display excellent attitudes to learning. They are inquisitive and eager to learn. They support and celebrate each other as learners.
- The school’s culture actively promotes pupils’ welfare so they feel safe and secure. They understand how to keep themselves safe and healthy.
- The lively and stimulating curriculum meets pupils’ needs very effectively and provides numerous opportunities to develop pupils’ skills, knowledge and understanding across a wide range of disciplines. It fosters their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development very successfully and provides a deep understanding of fundamental British values.
- Excellent leadership and teaching in the early years ensures that children make rapid progress from their starting points and are very well prepared to start Year 1.
- The proprietor and senior leaders are proactive in ensuring that the independent standards are met.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 (‘the independent standards’) and associated requirements.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Build on pupils' outstanding personal development by providing more opportunities for pupils to develop leadership skills.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- The new headteacher provides very strong and effective leadership to a dedicated team of staff. Leaders and managers at all levels, including the proprietor, are very ambitious and have high expectations for the school. Together they ensure that the independent school standards are met.
- Although the school has performed strongly over several years, there is no complacency. Regular reviews and a focused development plan identify where the school can do even better. Currently, challenging the most able pupils in Year 6 is leading to even stronger outcomes and a greater proportion of pupils exceeding the standard expected for their age. The school aims, typically with success, to help all pupils to achieve their potential.
- Systems to check on the achievement of pupils are robustly analysed by senior and middle leaders and the proprietor receives weekly updates on the progress of each class. Any underachievement is quickly identified and additional support is put in place by the special educational needs coordinator to enable all groups of pupils, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, those of minority ethnic backgrounds or those who speak English as an additional language, to make rapid progress. The school is totally committed to ensuring that it provides equal opportunities for all pupils.
- In this small school all staff have a leadership role as subject coordinators. They are accountable for the progress made in their subject areas, and conduct focus weeks in which they observe learning, scrutinise books and write action plans for further improvement. In this way, all staff contribute to school improvement and development. The performance management system is closely linked to the outcomes that pupils achieve.
- The experienced and dedicated special educational needs coordinator works with pupils and class teachers to devise relevant and appropriate individual support plans. Pupils are consulted on how they want to be supported. Over time, levels of support often decrease as pupils gain confidence and expertise.
- Staff morale is high. Senior leaders rigorously challenge staff but the staff feel appreciated and are given high-quality support and professional development. Speaking for many, one teacher summed this up by saying, 'All pupils are keen learners...it is a joy to be part of their development.' Staff have many opportunities to share good practice with the other schools in the Alpha group.
- The stimulating, innovative curriculum has been designed to ensure that skills are developed rapidly and to encourage problem-solving and investigation. Literacy and numeracy are integrated into the wider curriculum at all levels. Pupils are excited by the opportunity to learn musical instruments and participate in drama and join in more unusual sports, such as taekwondo. The curriculum is enriched by many well-organised and successful clubs at lunchtimes and after school. The school acknowledges that there are not as many opportunities for pupils to develop leadership skills as there could be and is planning to address this.
- The school's promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. It equips pupils to be thoughtful, caring and active members of their

community. This was seen in a celebration assembly, where pupils displayed different skills and achievements, such as gymnastics and musical performances, to the enthusiastic support of their peers. There is tangible excitement at the weekly announcement of winning house points. Pupils learn about many different faiths and visit places of worship. There is a strong emphasis on helping pupils to understand the importance of leading healthy lifestyles, including their emotional and mental health.

- Almost all parents spoken with and those responding to the Ofsted questionnaire, Parent View, were highly positive about the school. Comments such as 'absolutely fabulous' and 'a perfect example of how a school should be run' were frequent. A very small minority voiced concerns which were discussed in detail with school leaders and the proprietor.

Governance

- Governance is outstanding. The proprietor and two directors act as governors. Their role is to determine the strategic direction of the school. They ensure that all statutory requirements are met and that the school is on a sound financial footing.
- The proprietor owns the Alpha group of schools, six of which are in the North West. He allows the schools to set their own agenda for improvement and to be creative in developing their own strengths. However, he also challenges them to continually evolve and improve. Abbotsford has provided more specialist teaching in music, sport and modern foreign languages as a result of interventions by the proprietor.
- The schools in the Alpha group are able to support each other by sharing expertise and regularly meeting to discuss their work.
- The proprietor and directors conduct focused reviews of all aspects of the school's work each term and receive weekly updates on pupils' progress and achievement.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The school's record-keeping is exemplary, showing that all statutory requirements are met. Staff training is regular and comprehensive. All staff are fully aware of safeguarding procedures and confident in taking action if necessary. Through personal, social and health education lessons and circle time, staff explore issues of safety to ensure that children feel safe and confident. The school's comprehensive safeguarding policy is published on its website.
- The school has an open-door policy with parents and works with them to ensure that pupils are safe, happy and cared for well.
- The school conducts weekly reviews to ensure that the building and outside areas are safe, entrances are secure and that all rooms and equipment are safe and useable.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- Pupils make excellent progress throughout the school because teachers have high expectations of all pupils' work and behaviour. There is an expectation that all pupils will be stretched and that they will respond to challenges, both in the academic and wider

curriculum. Teachers form exceptionally positive relationships with pupils. Highly effective classroom management is deeply embedded in all year groups.

- Teachers have very secure subject knowledge and use questioning to continually extend pupils' learning. Pupils learn to think for themselves because of this high-quality questioning. Pupils become confident because of their strong communication skills.
- Teachers regularly assess pupils and use this information, coupled with day-to-day progress to adapt learning materials so that pupils are interested, engaged and working with enthusiasm. This is evident in pupils' books across a range of subjects. For example, in English, pupils showed a deep understanding in their study of Shakespeare's 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'. They learn how writers use different techniques, such as how to develop tension or mystery in storytelling.
- In mathematics, teachers aim to develop pupils' confidence and resilience to help them when faced with new and difficult challenges. Real energy is evident in many classrooms, with satisfied sighs of 'I've got it at last.'
- Pupils' work in science is impressive. A recent project on black holes showed pupils speculating, describing their observations and making deductions. Science topic books, in all year groups, show pupils understand scientific techniques.
- Pupils show considerable maturity in working on Judaism and the concept of mezuzahs. They were able to explain how they are used in Judaism. This year they have also looked in some detail at aspects of Christianity and Hinduism.
- Specialist teaching in gymnastics is very effective. Pupils are taught the value of teamwork, as well as individual excellence.
- Additional adults support very effectively the learning of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities so they make the same outstanding progress as other pupils.
- Phonics is taught very successfully across the early years and key stage 1. Effective support from teachers and teaching assistants enables pupils to make rapid progress. The pupils use this knowledge to help them read and spell unfamiliar words. Pupils across the school enjoy reading, either independently or within guided reading groups.
- Teachers set very high expectations for the presentation of work in pupils' books. Following the school's policy closely, teachers' marking and feedback supports pupils' learning.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Pupils are confident and self-assured. They have excellent attitudes to learning and work with enthusiasm and determination. By the time they reach the key stage 2 classes, they have learned how to discuss and debate effectively. They are curious about the world and developing the language and thought processes to speculate and reflect on their observations.

- Great emphasis is put on the importance of courtesy and good manners. Pupils are highly involved in the life of the school. They contribute positively to school life and the local community. Older pupils gladly take on responsibilities, such as becoming house captains, sports captains, play leaders or serving on the school council. They value their education and understand that it equips them for the future.
- Pupils have a clear understanding of British values and current affairs. They have recently held a mock election and their work shows a good understanding of the justice system, democracy and the importance of freedom of expression and choice. Pupils have a voice in school through the school council. They understand that this voice matters. The school improvement plan identifies the need to provide even more opportunities for pupils to develop leadership skills.
- All relevant policies for ensuring pupils' health and safety and well-being are in place. The very great majority of pupils are confident that they feel safe and know how to keep themselves safe in a variety of situations. Pupils have a good knowledge of different types of bullying, including cyber bullying. They say that bullying is rare and, if it does occur, it is quickly sorted out by teachers.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- Pupils' behaviour in lessons is excellent. They work effectively, both individually and as part of a group. They are keen to do well, settle to tasks quickly and share their ideas enthusiastically. As a result, there are no interruptions to learning and this contributes to their rapid progress.
- Behaviour around the school is impeccable. Across the whole school, manners are exemplary. Pupils get on very well with each other and with adults and visitors. At break and lunchtimes pupils enjoy vigorous games or chat together in friendly groups.
- Pupils' enjoyment of school is reflected in the fact that rates of attendance are consistently above, and often well above, average.

Outcomes for pupils

Outstanding

- From their different starting points all pupils make excellent progress in reading, writing and mathematics. In addition, they acquire many skills and achieve excellent outcomes in sports, such as gymnastics, music and drama.
- Pupils leave key stage 1 with a secure grounding in core subjects, including phonics, so they are able to make excellent progress across key stage 2.
- By the time pupils reach the end of Year 6, all reach expected standards for their age and around 90% exceed the expected standard in English and mathematics.
- In English, pupils master a variety of genres including poetry, diary-writing, factual reports and writing to persuade. Their standards in spelling, grammar and punctuation are well above average. Pupils have excellent communication skills, wide vocabularies and use an extensive range of language for their age.

- Scrutiny of pupils' work in mathematics shows a strong emphasis on problem-solving and confirms that pupils make rapid progress. In both English and mathematics, pupils are often working one year ahead of the expected standards for their age whenever possible. Pupils in Year 6 sometimes use Year 7 and Year 8 texts to help to prepare them very effectively for the secondary school curriculum.
- In science, pupils conduct extensive investigations into topics, such as day and night, reflection and refraction, evolution and inheritance. They become skilled at making predictions and observations and then drawing conclusions from their findings.
- The work in pupils' books shows consistently excellent topic work in history, geography, religious education, art and technology. Pupils have strong skills in information and communication technology (ICT).
- The most able pupils are encouraged to push themselves further. For example, Year 6 gifted mathematicians are through to the second round of a national competition. There is a gifted and talented writing group, thinking skills sessions and an ICT coding group. As a result, more pupils are being added to the gifted and talented register each year.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make excellent progress because individual education plans are tailored to their needs and regularly adapted and adjusted. Some pupils quickly return to mainstream work after effective interventions have addressed weaker elements in their learning.
- Pupils who speak English as an additional language make the same excellent progress as others. There is no difference in the achievement of girls and boys.
- Pupils from Years 1 to 6 represent the school in sporting activities throughout the year. All pupils take part in an annual drama production, and several have taken part in professional theatrical productions at the Manchester Opera House in the last five years.
- The school aims to ensure that pupils are, by the end of Year 6, 'secondary-ready', emotionally, socially and academically. Pupils in Year 6 confirm that they feel well prepared for entrance examinations and the next stage of their education. They value the opportunities to meet teachers from nearby secondary schools. On average between 85 and 100% of Year 6 pupils gain entry to selective secondary schools.

Early years provision

Outstanding

- Children make excellent progress in the early years, as a result of very effective leadership, high-quality teaching and strong provision. Most children join the pre-school class with skills and knowledge that are typical for their age. They make excellent progress from their starting points so they are very well prepared for learning in Year 1. The proportion of children achieving a good level of development is well above the national average, and almost half of all children exceed the expectations for their age.
- Children learn very well in stimulating indoor and outdoor areas. Staff work closely together to ensure that learning is always motivating and enjoyable in all the areas of development. They set the highest expectations for attention, behaviour and learning. Activities are linked through exciting themes, such as learning about outer space, dinosaurs and the weather. Children's work on weather is particularly impressive. They have learned the names of different types of clouds and have done experiments to see

which materials are waterproof and to understand that clouds are mists of tiny drops of water.

- Staff continually assess how well children are doing and use this information very aptly to plan activities to further develop learning. The needs of individual children, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, are met well.
- Children's behaviour is excellent. They work happily together, sharing resources and talking about their activities. They show high levels of concentration, perseverance and enjoyment during focus activities, when they choose their own learning activities. They show respect to all staff and each other. Even the youngest children are open and confident when talking to visitors. They are curious and motivated to learn.
- During the inspection, children in the pre-school were conducting an election to vote for their favourite character in the story of 'Beauty and the Beast' and practising their early writing skills. Reception children were reviewing their learning during the week and writing about which activity they had most enjoyed. Children are taught to reflect on their learning from a very early age. This contributes to their excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The school has very close links with parents, who indicate their wholehearted approval and appreciation of the early years setting. Parents had nothing but praise for the quality of teaching and the progress that their children were making.
- The leadership of the early years is outstanding. The leader has a very clear understanding of strengths and areas for further development. All learning activities are very well planned, providing the children with purposeful activities to extend their learning and progress. Assessment is accurate, ensuring that the next steps for children are clearly identified. All welfare requirements are met so children learn in a safe, healthy, secure environment.

School details

Unique reference number	106386
DfE registration number	358/6012
Inspection number	10034023

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Other independent school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	181
Number of part-time pupils	None
Proprietor	Mr Ali Khan (Alpha Schools Ltd)
Chair	Mr Ali Khan
Headteacher	Mrs Catherine Howard
Annual fees (day pupils)	£2,230–2,445 per term
Telephone number	0161 748 3261
Website	www.abbotsfordprepschool.co.uk
Email address	secretary@abbotsfordprepschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	ISI inspection, May 2014

Information about this school

- Abbotsford Preparatory School was founded in Urmston in 1908 as Caius House School, and moved to its present site in 1997. In June 2013 it became part of Alpha Schools North, a company wholly owned by its proprietor. The proprietor and his team manage financial and strategic matters, with the day-to-day management of the school being the responsibility of the headteacher.
- Abbotsford is a non-selective, coeducational school for children from 3 to 11 years. There is a nursery owned by the same proprietor on the same site, Little Gems, which caters for

children from four months to four years old. A separate report is published on Little Gems Nursery.

- Almost half of the pupils come from minority ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of pupils who have English as an additional language is low. There are no disadvantaged pupils.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average. Two pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- The school website is compliant with statutory requirements.
- The school does not make use of any alternative providers as part of the curriculum.
- The school aims to ensure that every child achieves as well as they can in a safe, caring community.
- Since the previous ISI inspection in May 2014, a new headteacher was appointed in September 2016.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in all year groups in a range of subjects, attended two assemblies and listened to pupils in Years 2 and 5 reading. They looked at the work in pupils' books in all year groups and in many different subjects.
- They held meetings with school leaders, the proprietor and one director, members of staff and groups of pupils.
- The inspectors scrutinised all policies and procedures in order to establish the school's compliance with the independent school standards. This included an extensive tour of the school site and review of health and safety documentation.
- The views of staff were gained from the 30 responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire, and from discussions with teachers, teaching assistants, administration and other support staff.
- Inspectors gained the views of parents from the 56 responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View, and from meeting parents who were bringing their children to school.
- The inspectors scrutinised the school's documentation relating to safeguarding, the quality of teaching and learning, pupils' attainment and progress, behaviour and attendance records, curriculum planning and school policies.

Inspection team

Judith Straw, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Linda Griffiths

Ofsted Inspector

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