



**INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE**

**INTEGRATED INSPECTION  
WYCOMBE ABBEY SCHOOL**

# INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

## Wycombe Abbey School

Full Name of School	<b>Wycombe Abbey School</b>		
DfE Number	<b>825/6018</b>		
Registered Charity Number	<b>310638</b>		
Address	<b>Wycombe Abbey School Abbey Way High Wycombe Buckinghamshire HP11 1PE</b>		
Telephone Number	<b>01494 520381</b>		
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Email Address	<b>schoolsecretary@wycombeabbey.com</b>		
Headmistress	<b>Mrs Rhiannon Wilkinson</b>		
Chairman of Governors	<b>Mr Patrick Sherrington</b>		
Age Range	<b>10 to 18</b>		
Total Number of Pupils	<b>552</b>		
Gender of Pupils	<b>Pupils</b>		
Numbers by Age	10-18	<b>552</b>	
Number of Day Pupils	Total:	<b>33</b>	
Number of Boarders	Total:	<b>519</b>	
	Full:	<b>519</b>	Weekly: <b>0</b>
Inspection Dates	<b>04 Nov 2014 to 07 Nov 2014</b>		

## PREFACE

This inspection report follows the *ISI schedule*, which occupies a period of four continuous days in the school. The previous ISI inspection was in November 2008.

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is the body approved by the Secretary of State 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, as amended. The range of these Regulations, which replace those first introduced on 1 September 2003, can be viewed on the website [www.legislation.gov.uk](http://www.legislation.gov.uk). Additionally, inspections will consider the school's accessibility plan under Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 and the ban on corporal punishment introduced by the School Standards and Framework Act 1998.

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

This inspection contains specific judgements on the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools. It comments on the progress made by the school in meeting the recommendations set out in the most recent statutory boarding inspection and evaluates the quality of the boarding experience and its contribution to pupils' education, personal development and welfare. Until September 2011, Boarding inspections were carried out by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), Children's Services and Skills.

The inspection of the school is from an educational perspective and provides limited inspection of other aspects, although inspectors 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.

Inspectors may be aware of individual safeguarding concerns, allegations and complaints as part of the inspection process. Such matters will not usually be referred to in the published report but will have been considered by the team in reaching their judgements.

Both Ofsted and ISI inspect and report on the Independent School Standards Regulations. However, they apply different frameworks and have different criteria for judging school quality that are suited to the different types of schools they inspect. Both use a four point scale when making judgements of quality but, whilst the ISI terminology reflects quality judgements that are at least equivalent to those used by Ofsted, they also reflect the differences in approach. ISI reports do not provide a single overarching judgement for the school but instead give a clear judgement on each aspect of the school's work at the beginning of each section. **These headline statements must include one of the ISI descriptors 'excellent', 'good', 'sound' or 'unsatisfactory', and where Achievement is 'exceptional' that term may be used for the top grade.** Elsewhere in the report, inspectors may use a range of different adjectives to make judgements. **For EYFS registered provision (for pupils aged under three), reports are required to use the same terminology ('outstanding', 'good', 'requires improvement' and 'inadequate') as Ofsted reports.**

## 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 chairman of governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended registration sessions, chapel and an assembly. Inspectors visited boarding houses and the facilities for sick or injured pupils. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined regulatory documentation made available by the school.

### Inspectors

Mr Adrian Underwood	Reporting Inspector
Mr Geoffrey Hill	Team Inspector (Former Head of Department, HMC school)
Miss Susan Hincks	Team Inspector (Headmistress, GSA school)
Mr Christopher Holmes	Team Inspector (Former Head of Department, HMC school)
Dr Jennette Jefferies	Team Inspector (Deputy Head, GSA school)
Mr Nigel Lashbrook	Team Inspector (Headmaster, HMC school)
Mr Simon Northcote-Green	Team Inspector (Deputy Head, HMC school)
Mr John Orr	Team Inspector (Senior Teacher, HMC school)
Miss Jean Walker	Team Inspector (Deputy Head, GSA school)
Mrs Linda Trevethick	Co-ordinating Inspector for Boarding
Mr Andrew Lee	Team Inspector for Boarding (Former Senior Master, HMC school)

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## 1. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

- 1.1 Wycombe Abbey School was founded in 1896 by Dame Frances Dove as a boarding school for pupils. The 170-acre site is close to the centre of High Wycombe and includes woods, gardens and a lake. The school is owned by the Pupils' Education Company Limited, a registered charity, and the directors of the company constitute the governing council of the school and are trustees of the charity. Within a Christian ethos and a well-ordered and caring environment, the school aims to: pursue the ideal of academic excellence; develop each pupil's talents in creative, physical and social skills; and encourage an understanding of the needs of others. The core values of mutual respect, encouragement and trust were chosen by the pupils, and the boarding ethos aims to provide the opportunity for pupils to maximise their potential in a myriad of ways.
- 1.2 Since the previous full inspection in 2008, the school has appointed assistant housemistresses, tutors and day matrons to the houses, created a work experience programme, revised the induction programme for new staff and further developed the PSHCE (personal, social, health and cultural education) curriculum. The senior team has been restructured. New staff accommodation has been built and improvements have been made to boarding houses. A new headmistress was appointed in September 2013.
- 1.3 Of the 552 pupils, ranging in age from 10 to 18, 172 are in the sixth form. A total of 315 pupils live within 50 miles of the school; approximately a quarter are from overseas, and 78 are from minority ethnic groups. Most pupils are from business or professional families. All Year 13 pupils gain entry to universities in the UK, the USA and elsewhere.
- 1.4 Boarding accommodation is organised into 11 houses. Approximately 60 pupils enter Year 7 and join the junior house for their first year. The nine mixed-age senior houses, for pupils in Years 8 to 12, are geographically split into three areas around the school site. Up to 30 pupils join in Year 9 and go straight into their senior house, as do the small number of pupils joining in Year 12. Clarence House provides a study-bedroom complex run on student lines for all Year 13 pupils. Each of the 33 day pupils is a member of a boarding house. The deputy head oversees boarding alongside the boarding co-ordinator who, in turn, is a member of the school senior management team.
- 1.5 The average ability of pupils in Years 7 to 11 is well above the national average with most pupils having well above average ability, and very few having ability that is less than above average. The ability profile of the sixth form is above the national average for pupils in sixth-form education, with around a third of pupils having ability that is well above average, and few pupils having ability that is less than above average. Of the 54 pupils identified by the school as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), 46 receive specialist learning support. English is an additional language (EAL) for 80 pupils, five of whom receive support for their English. No pupil has a statement of educational needs or an education, health and care plan.

- 1.6 National Curriculum (NC) nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school. The year group nomenclature used by the school and its National Curriculum equivalence are shown in the following table.

School	NC name
UIII	Year 7
LIV	Year 8
UIV	Year 9
LV	Year 10
UV	Year 11
LVI	Year 12
UVI	Year 13

## **2. THE SUCCESS OF THE SCHOOL**

### **2.(a) Main findings**

- 2.1 Wycombe Abbey is extremely successful in meeting its aims. The pupils' achievements and learning are exceptional. Pupils achieve exceptional results in national and international examinations and make progress that is high in relation to the average for pupils of similar abilities. Complementing these academic results is exceptional achievement in extra-curricular activities with pupils regularly gaining county and national recognition. Pupils hugely enjoy the discipline of learning, using their discursive and analytical skills to challenge each other and their teachers. They are also independent learners and develop sophisticated research skills.
- 2.2 The pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Pupils are engaging and confident and enjoy the challenge of understanding the moral dilemmas of society. Pupils appreciate the spiritual strand of their lives, both through Christian worship and exploring the intangible. They value the many opportunities for their cultural development through sharing their lives with those from other countries, and by being involved in a rich programme of artistic activities. Underpinning the pupils' confidence is the excellent quality of pastoral care and boarding life, including arrangements for safeguarding, welfare, health and safety. The houses are the heart of the school's care for its pupils, and it is the boarding life which contributes highly to pupils' excellent personal development. In the pre-inspection questionnaire, the responses of a minority of pupils to some aspects of the school were not wholly positive, but in discussions with pupils during the inspection, they did not have the same opinions and were very positive about their school.
- 2.3 Excellent governance, leadership and management have supported the school's progress since the previous inspection. The governors have a commitment to high standards of human and physical resources. This is reflected in the excellent quality of staffing, buildings and resources for teaching and learning. Governors are aware of the need to develop new boarding accommodation and more teaching centres and these are central to the school's building plan. Through meeting regularly with pupils and observing lessons, as well as through their committees, the governors confirm their commitment to the school and its future. Excellent leadership and management at all levels support the aims of the school. Although the current senior leadership is relatively new, it already reflects the strengths of listening, engaging with pupils and parents, supporting staff across the academic and boarding spectrum and strategic planning. However, as senior leaders confirm, this planning is not yet fully rounded, and the programme of staff appraisal is not yet fully refined. Middle management at department and house level is strong. The recommendations of the previous report have been robustly addressed. The tutor system, work experience and community service are all strong elements of school life. The senior leaders' committee structure has been effectively refined and departments manage their own budgets.

## **2.(b) Action points**

### **(i) Compliance with regulatory requirements**

- 2.4 The school meets all the requirements of the Independent School Standards Regulations 2010.
- 2.5 The school meets all the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools 2013.

### **(ii) Recommendations for further improvement**

- 2.6 The school is advised to make the following improvements.
1. Ensure that strategic planning fully supports all aspects of the life of the school.
  2. Refine the appraisal system and include appraisal of teachers' tutoring responsibilities.

### **3. THE QUALITY OF ACADEMIC AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS**

#### **3.(a) The quality of the pupils' achievements and learning**

- 3.1 The quality of the pupils' achievements and learning is exceptional.
- 3.2 In lessons and extra-curricular activities, pupils' achievement is exceptional. This reflects the school's aim to pursue the ideal of academic excellence and develop each pupil's talents. The pupils are articulate and confident, and their application of mathematical, information and communication technology (ICT) and literary skills, as well as logical thought, are highly developed. They are able to argue their points cogently and have an intellectual curiosity. In many subjects, including art, music and the humanities, high levels of creativity are evident. In physical activity, pupils achieve individual and team honours at county, regional, national and at times international level in a wide range of disciplines. Pupils with SEND and those with EAL progress well, assisted by specialist support within the school. The most able students are supported by academic extension programmes.
- 3.3 The following analysis uses the national data for the years 2011 to 2013. These are the most recent three years for which comparative statistics are currently available. Results in GCSE examinations have been exceptional in relation to the national average for pupils in maintained schools. They are above the average for pupils in maintained selective schools. IGCSE results for all subjects have been higher than worldwide and UK averages. Results at A level have been exceptional in relation to the national average for maintained schools and well above the national average for pupils in maintained selective schools. Results showed further improvement in 2014, with increased percentages of entries being graded A\* or A at GCSE and A level. These results, together with the pupils' work and achievement in lessons, indicate that pupils make progress that is high in relation to pupils of similar ability, including those with SEND or EAL. Pupils identified as SEND or EAL achieve results that are at least in line with other pupils and in many cases, exceed expectations. Pupils consistently gain places at universities in the UK and the USA that have highly competitive entry requirements.
- 3.4 Pupils' attitudes towards their work, their ability to take responsibility for their own learning and to organise their own work schedules are exemplary. They have a love of learning, which goes far beyond the demands of examination specifications. They work well both independently and collaboratively and gain great satisfaction from producing work of a high standard that is exceptionally well presented and organised. Pupils are keen to participate, be interactive and are supportive of each other. They listen carefully in class and have a sophisticated understanding of the topics covered. Pupils with SEND or EAL are equally committed in lessons and contribute to the animated discussions. This was seen, for example, in a geography lesson developing skills of synoptic thinking, and in an English lesson analysing an anthology.
- 3.5 The pupils are successful in a variety of team and individual sports, participating at a high level in lacrosse, tennis, squash, athletics, netball, football and gymnastics. Pupils have represented England in lacrosse and football, and there are county players in a wide variety of sports. In national competitions such as Mathematics Challenges and Olympiads, pupils consistently perform well. A strong programme of science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) activities inspires a significant number of pupils to study engineering at university. A very large number of pupils successfully enter essay competitions. In debating, Young Enterprise, music and

drama pupils achieve high levels of success as well gaining much enjoyment from these activities.

### **3.(b) The contribution of curricular and extra-curricular provision**

- 3.6 The contribution of curricular and extra-curricular provision activities is excellent.
- 3.7 In Years 7 to 11, the breadth of curriculum provision meets the aim of keeping the pupils' options for future study as open as possible, providing them with an excellent academic foundation. Throughout the school, pupils of all ages and abilities benefit from the opportunity to develop their creative, physical and social talents. Pupils learn two modern foreign languages alongside Latin and Greek in Year 7, and are able to select two or three, including Mandarin, in Year 8. An extensive range of other languages is also offered outside the main curriculum. At GCSE, pupils choose four or five optional subjects and more able pupils study Latin and Greek in a single block, known as 'Gratin'. The choice of either the extended project qualification or a critical thinking course gives additional challenge for sixth formers. The well-being programme for personal development, delivered in discrete lessons in Years 7 to 10 and as part of general studies in Years 11 to 13, has been refined with due regard to pupils' opinions about the appropriate content and teaching methodology.
- 3.8 Pupils with SEND and EAL are identified at an early stage of their school career and are very well supported, both in class and within the specialist provision, enabling them to fulfil their academic potential. Opportunities for academic enrichment outside the standard curriculum are many and varied, for example, an 'Endeavour Week,' when pupils as well as teachers are encouraged to take risks, try new things and understand the importance of failure. The academic societies, led by sixth-form pupils, contribute to pupils' intellectual and social development. Since the previous inspection, the school has made good progress in addressing the recommendation to enhance the careers education and guidance offered. Pupils now confirm that they benefit from excellent advice on these topics.
- 3.9 The curriculum is supported by an excellent range of extra-curricular activities, which caters for all ages, abilities and needs, in accordance with the school's stated aims; these activities are greatly appreciated by pupils. The extensive programme of sport provides something for everyone. Whilst the school is rightly proud of its pupils who play lacrosse at national level, it organises a full set of fixtures for lower ability teams: B, C and sometimes D teams. Musicians are in the National Youth Orchestra and the National Youth Choir, and in school pupils also enjoy many music and drama events such as the informal lunchtime concerts, the Year 10 plays, the 'Highlights' dance show including the 'Street Dance Company'. London Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts results are very strong, as is participation in The Duke of Edinburgh's Award.
- 3.10 Many clubs and societies, all run by pupils, meet regularly throughout the week. During the inspection, the Psychology Society was observed holding a lively symposium on 'Is Your Brain Male or Female?' Pupils learn much about the wider world and themselves through the many charitable activities which are at the heart of school life. The recommendation from the previous inspection to develop community service has been strongly met. Through the 'Horizons' programme pupils teach local children with disabilities in the school swimming pool. Local elderly people attend the Year 7 'Christmas Entertainment', while pupils help with literacy at a nearby multi-racial comprehensive school. Year 13 chemists help at a

local primary school, and others visit the local hospice, including a group of musicians who give regular lunchtime concerts.

### **3.(c) The contribution of teaching**

- 3.11 The quality of teaching is excellent.
- 3.12 The teaching at Wycombe Abbey supports the school in its aim of the pursuit of academic excellence. Teachers are particularly knowledgeable in their individual subject areas. They show a love of their subject and a passion to share this with the pupils. The teaching in almost two thirds of lessons observed was judged as excellent, with almost all at least good. Lessons are consistently well planned and the pupils quickly engage in a wide variety of activities and tasks. Relationships between teachers and pupils are excellent, and this mutual respect adds to a strong working atmosphere in lessons. Teachers use a range of teaching styles; they are adaptable and very aware of their pupils' needs and abilities. During lessons, pupils' contributions are valued and well used, and they are taught in a way which encourages them to be active in their own learning. They ask questions with confidence and frequently develop the topic with imaginative contributions, asking "what if" type questions. Teachers are well aware of the high achievers in their classes and they use extra material to challenge and extend them in lessons and homework. The needs of SEND and EAL pupils are met by supportive teaching, and where appropriate, different tasks.
- 3.13 Teachers use a variety of resources and materials to stimulate discussion, explain ideas and involve the pupils in tasks which encourage them to think for themselves. Lessons are well paced and frequently reflect how much the pupils enjoy their time in the classroom. Any collaborative work shows the pupils to be constructive and good communicators with each other. A strong sense of purpose pervades all lessons. Pupils are encouraged to have a "can do" mentality and have high expectations in all areas of their studies.
- 3.14 Teachers use ICT resources to good effect in lessons. This might be displaying graphs on an interactive graph drawing program on the whiteboard, an interactive mapping program in geography, or modelling software to illustrate osmosis and diffusion in biology. Teachers regularly share ideas for lessons and materials with their colleagues at department meetings. This peer support works well and stimulates teacher discussion about their subject and how to teach it. Peer review is used when monitoring the marking of pupils' work. This marking is consistently thorough and is used effectively to help teachers know their pupils' abilities. Using baseline data and the school's excellent tracking system, teachers monitor the pupils' progress extremely well, and are able to use their teaching time to efficiently help those pupils needing particular attention, or those who benefit from extra challenge. Marking is helpful, encouraging and valued by the pupils as part of their own self-assessment, so they understand their level of achievement and what they need to do to progress.
- 3.15 In the pre-inspection questionnaire, a minority of pupils expressed concern about the academic workload. The school imaginatively allows pupils beyond Year 7 to manage their own timing of homework tasks within the weekly homework timetable. The pupils can plan their independent work around their other activities during the week. From assessment of the preparation timetable and discussions with pupils, inspectors did not find evidence that the quantity of work set was other than appropriate.

## **4. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT**

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

- 4.1 The quality of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent.
- 4.2 The school fulfils its aim to develop core values of mutual respect, encouragement and trust. The pupils' develop an excellent sense of spiritual awareness. Pupils are mature and self-assured and relish the opportunity given to organise school activities such as chapel services. The chapel lies at the heart of the school and is a focal point in the spiritual development of pupils. The Christian ethos is strong, but other faiths are celebrated and respected. Challenging topics for discussion are introduced to pupils at an early age. Inspired by a speaker who lost his sight, a Year 7 workshop focused on enjoying one's unique gifts and strengths and gaining in confidence to be oneself and to contribute to school life and to others. Pupils report that they value the environment in which they live. As they go about their lives, they are enabled to develop their spiritual values through the beauty of the campus and the challenging elements in pupils' art displays. Pupils report that they find all the musical events at the school a time for contemplation of the intangible and of their own worth and place in society.
- 4.3 The moral development of the pupils is excellent. Pupils have a strong moral sense and awareness and appreciate the difference between right and wrong which is evident in the way in which they support each other and behave around the school. They recognise the importance of rules and are respectful of authority. Behaviour in lessons is exemplary. Pupils explore moral and ethical issues such as the death penalty, abortion and euthanasia in the well-being programme. Pupils have recently researched the relationship between religion, morality and the law in considering whether different religious legal traditions should be accommodated within UK laws.
- 4.4 Pupils demonstrate excellent social development. Pupils are polite, friendly and well-mannered, are strongly supportive of each other and show real concern for each other's wellbeing. Pupils show initiative and confidently converse with adults. They are able to articulate their thoughts clearly, and grow up as individuals encouraged to take risks and not to fear failure. In their response to the pre-inspection questionnaire, a small minority of pupils felt that there were insufficient opportunities to take on responsibilities. Inspection evidence did not support this view. Pupils confidently take on responsibility, whether it be as heads of house, school prefects, school officers, games captains, school council representatives, or leaders of societies. Pupils strongly support a variety of charities. The 'Give Back' ethos provides excellent clarity of approach in charity work. Considerable sums of money are raised annually through whole school and house fund-raising activities. The support of the South Bucks Hospice is especially noteworthy as is the fostering of strong links between each house and pupil selected charities.
- 4.5 The cultural awareness of the pupils is particularly strong. Pupils enjoy learning about other cultural traditions from their peers from overseas and enjoy celebrating these through special meals and cultural days. Pupils explore Western cultural traditions through dance and drama, and develop an understanding of the British political and democratic systems through the formal curriculum and the school societies. Pupils appreciate Britain's rich cultural heritage through events such as the summer tennis tournament followed by strawberries and cream, mimicking Wimbledon, fireworks on 'Bonfire Night' and a whole school visit to a pantomime. Overseas boarders spoke of appreciating the British sense of humour.

- 4.6 Pupils attain an excellent standard of personal development by the time they leave the school.

#### **4.(b) The contribution of arrangements for pastoral care**

- 4.7 The school's arrangements for pastoral care are excellent.
- 4.8 The quality of pastoral care meets the school's aim to support, cherish and nurture all pupils, making their happiness and well-being a major priority. Staff throughout the school know the pupils well, and the pastoral structure is highly effective in providing support and guidance. As the pastoral care and tutoring provision is centred in the boarding houses, the school has instituted a further level of care with the appointment of assistant housemistresses and tutors assigned to houses.
- 4.9 This support is well recognised and appreciated by pupils. Further accessible support is provided by the school counselling service, resident matrons and medical staff. Pupils feel safe and secure within the school. They know to whom to turn if they are troubled, and speak openly of the real sense of family within the houses and the school community. For those in need, care plans are put in place, and information related to these is monitored sensitively and appropriately.
- 4.10 Relationships between staff and pupils are excellent and are matched by the quality of relationships amongst pupils across all the ages. Based on the school's aim to foster mutual respect, senior pupils play a major role in creating a supportive and harmonious community. An extensive range of opportunities for physical activity contributes significantly to pupils' healthy living. Pupils are also encouraged to eat healthily.
- 4.11 The school has clear policies and procedures to promote good behaviour and for tolerance of all members of the community. Incidents related to bullying are rare, and pupils say that when reported, these are dealt with swiftly and effectively. In the pre-inspection questionnaire, a small minority of pupils indicated that the school did not apply rewards and sanctions fairly, and did not deal with bullying incidents. Detailed school records and interviews with pupils indicate that rewards and sanctions are proportionate and used consistently, and that any bullying incidents are handled effectively. There are clear systems, along with the appropriate accessibility plan, to ensure that pupils with SEND or EAL are well supported.

#### **4.(c) The contribution of arrangements for welfare, health and safety**

- 4.12 The school's arrangements for welfare, health and safety are excellent.
- 4.13 The school has robust and well-tried systems to safeguard pupils' welfare, health and safety. Risk management is a priority and all activities are carefully assessed for safety without restricting pupils' personal development through challenge. The school has a sophisticated electronic system of fire prevention which is reinforced by appropriately trained personnel who supervise regular fire drills. The custodians (security staff) are a visible presence and the pupils reported that they feel very safe in the school. All health and safety issues are monitored by the health and safety committee which reports to the governors' land and buildings committee.
- 4.14 Registration of pupils is carefully managed and recorded, and for the few day boarders, the school has effective procedures for following up unexpected absences. The electronic admission register logs all the required entries and is backed up and stored correctly. The medical centre supports all pupils who are ill or

injured. The first-aid policy is effective in practice and includes good provision for specialist areas such as sport and expeditions.

- 4.15 All members of staff are regularly trained in child protection. The higher level training of the school's designated senior leaders for child protection is up-to-date and safe recruitment protocols are fully implemented. The school's arrangements for safeguarding and the school's policy and procedures have regard to official guidance. Appropriate records of child protection issues are kept and are fully detailed, including recording links with external agencies as necessary. The provision for those who require extra learning or personal support is excellent.

#### **4.(d) The quality of boarding**

- 4.16 The quality of boarding is excellent.
- 4.17 The outcomes for boarders are excellent. The school is extremely successful in achieving its boarding aim to provide the opportunity for pupils to maximise their potential in a myriad of ways. Boarders are very enthusiastic about their boarding experience. They develop a high degree of confidence and independence, becoming capable young women, well able to face the challenges of the modern world. The older boarders take care of younger ones and the mixed age dormitories, for Years 8 to 11, are regarded by the boarders as a very special feature of the school. This arrangement has a real impact in establishing strong friendships across the age groups. Boarders feel well supported, appreciating the care they receive from staff. They mix extremely well and overseas boarders and those with SEND and EAL are fully integrated into the life of their houses. Boarders love the community atmosphere and the warm relationships they have with each other and the boarding staff, who clearly know them very well. Boarders are encouraged to take on roles of responsibility to assist in the smooth running of the houses. They vote for their head of house and choose boarders who demonstrate the ability to help and support others. These boarders work very closely with the housemistresses, but do not give sanctions. Boarders have daily access to information about the wider world through newspapers, television and other technology.
- 4.18 The quality of boarding provision and care is excellent. The comprehensive induction programme for Year 7 starts the term before admission and includes social activities. This helps them settle quickly into boarding life and feel part of their house community. New boarders joining at other times are inducted equally effectively. Induction into the Year 13 house is carefully planned in order to ease the transition into the more independent boarding style.
- 4.19 Boarders have a range of adults to whom they can turn for help and guidance. Contact details including those of the independent listener and other pertinent outside agencies are displayed in each house and in pupil diaries. Boarders are very confident to approach any appropriate adult, although their first port of call for support is often an older girl in the house. Medical care of boarders is excellent. In their response to the questionnaire a few boarders expressed dissatisfaction with the medical care. Inspection evidence did not support this view. Medical records are secure, and medication is correctly stored and dispensed either in houses or in the medical centre. Suitable arrangements are in place for boarders to self-medicate. The rights of boarders to medical confidentiality are respected. Boarders can attend the medical centre without an appointment, and a qualified nurse is available at all

- times. A doctor attends two mornings a week and boarders can access specialist medical services.
- 4.20 The effectiveness of arrangements for welfare and safeguarding are excellent. A thorough maintenance programme ensures buildings are well maintained within the context of the extensive building programme for the houses. Secure systems are fully operational to ensure all electrical equipment in houses is checked. Appropriate fire risk assessments and fire prevention measures are implemented; regular fire drills take place during boarding hours. These are recorded and records held centrally.
- 4.21 For some boarders all meals are taken in the central dining room. For others, a mixture of provision gives them experience of in-house and centralised dining. The oldest boarders delight in cooking their evening meal. In response to the pre-inspection questionnaire, a minority of boarders expressed dissatisfaction with the quality of food and the handling of boarder's opinions. Inspection evidence did not support either view. Inspectors heard plenty of evidence that boarders felt that the pupil voice was taken seriously and ideas acknowledged, particularly at the termly headmistresses' forums in each house and the regular house meetings.
- 4.22 Sampling of meals and interviews with boarders indicated significant approval of the food provided. In response, however, to a recommendation in the previous welfare report, and taking into account boarders' views, the school has appointed a new catering service from January 2015. Currently, the food provided is plentiful and of good quality. Vegetarian options, special diets and plenty of fresh fruit are provided. In their response to the pre-inspection questionnaire, a small minority of boarders expressed dissatisfaction with snacks and drinks outside meal times. Inspection evidence did not support this view. Houses receive regular deliveries of fresh fruit, bread, milk and cheese. Drinking water is freely available at all times. House kitchen areas are well lit and modern, providing the facilities for making snacks and drinks.
- 4.23 A wide ranging programme of voluntary activities during the week and at weekends caters for individual needs. Boarding staff enjoy providing regular in-house cooking and creative sessions. Boarders use the school grounds and sports facilities to help them keep fit and healthy. In response to the pre-inspection questionnaire, a minority of boarders said that they did not have enough free time. Observation in houses and interviews with boarders indicated they have sufficient free time and learn to manage their own work commitments independently. The lounge areas in the houses provide excellent spaces for socialising, relaxing or watching television. Boarders have access to several quiet spaces if they wish to be alone. In response to the pre-inspection questionnaire, a few pupils did not agree that their belongings were safe. Inspection evidence did not support this view. Lockable space is available, but used infrequently as the boarders consider their belongings to be safe. Laundry provision is excellent.
- 4.24 Houses are clean, warm and welcoming. Those houses which are in line for planned development are nevertheless well maintained. Measures are effective to secure houses so that there is no unauthorised access. Bedrooms are appropriately furnished, comfortable, and adequately heated. Many boarders personalise their own areas in attractive ways. All Year 13 boarders benefit from single study bedrooms. Toilets, showers and hand basins are plentiful, and baths are available in each house. Boarders contact parents with ease; most using mobile telephones

or the internet. Boarding staff have very effective lines of communication with parents and guardians.

- 4.25 Boarders report that they feel safe. Appropriate checks and agreements are in place for additional adults living in the boarding houses. Boarding staff are easily accessible both day and night. They have suitably separate accommodation within the houses, to which boarders may have supervised access for social occasions. The anti-bullying and behaviour policies are effective, demonstrated by the very low incidences of interventions by staff. Recording of rewards and sanctions is excellent, meeting a recommendation from the previous welfare report. Boarders universally state that there is hardly ever any bullying or unkindness, and should it occur they are confident it would be dealt with immediately. Correct signing in and out procedures are in place, but some inconsistencies across the houses are being addressed. Understanding of the missing child policy is secure.
- 4.26 The effectiveness of the leadership and management of the boarding provision is excellent. The highly experienced leadership, alongside the boarding co-ordinator, leads the pastoral team very effectively. A strong commitment to both physical developments and the management of boarding is a major element of the school's strategic planning, but this planning is not yet fully developed. In the interim, monitoring of provision and practice is effective. Pastoral meetings are regularly held and fully minuted. Information is appropriately shared about boarders' welfare and their academic progress. In their responses to the questionnaires, an overwhelming majority of boarders and their parents expressed a high level of satisfaction with the boarding experience.

## **5. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

### **5.(a) The quality of governance**

- 5.1 The governance of the school is excellent.
- 5.2 The school's aims and values are strongly supported by a committed board of governors which includes those with expertise in many fields pertinent to education. The governors promote consultation and are a listening governing body. They observe lessons, hold regular meetings with pupils and staff and take soundings from parents by formal and informal conduits. This is reflected in the consultation exercise with senior pupils on the design of the new boarding houses, one element of the wide-ranging building programme for the school.
- 5.3 The governing body's structure of committees for discrete areas of the school, which report to the full governing body termly, ensure that all governors are well informed about current issues and planned developments. Governors are fully involved with the life of the school, giving them insight into its workings beyond the comprehensive reports from members of the senior leadership team. In addition, a governor's tenure is reviewed every three years, reflecting the governing body's commitment to giving active and relevant support to the school's development. This is complemented by thorough induction and update training for governors.
- 5.4 The governors have recently appointed a new headmistress who has developed a new senior leadership team. The governing body works extremely effectively with this new team, and equally, strongly supports and challenges the new leadership in its priorities for the school's further development. In relation to statutory requirements, the governors review policies regularly, and the full governing body conducts an annual review of child protection procedures.
- 5.5 The governors of Wycombe Abbey are highly committed to continuing the founder's vision for the school, but also to ensuring, in partnership with the senior leaders, that the school's education, in all its aspects, is fitting for the future generations of Wycombe pupils.

### **5.(b) The quality of leadership and management, including links with parents, carers and guardians**

- 5.6 The quality of leadership and management is excellent.
- 5.7 Leadership and management at all levels in the school fully support the core aims of the school and ensure that the school is a happy, fulfilling and caring community. A clear and strong educational direction is provided by the senior leadership team which is embraced and replicated by staff in other management and leadership roles throughout the school. Under the direction of the senior leaders, a cohesive approach amongst boarding, pastoral, academic and support staff is evident, which facilitates the excellent levels of pupils' achievement and personal development. A clear and unambiguous commitment to ensure the care and safeguarding of pupils is at the heart of the school's management. All staff are trained in their roles in safeguarding, welfare, health and safety.
- 5.8 A culture of thoughtful self-evaluation and a willingness to listen to pupils, parents and staff has enabled the school to develop clear priorities for its future

development. This is demonstrated by the ambitious '120 Campaign' which aims to enhance significantly the boarding and learning environment of the school. Senior leaders recognise that the school's strategic plan is not fully refined to ensure clear and co-ordinated development plans for all areas of the school. Currently, the quality and depth of some development planning is variable, and a coherent link to the school's strategic plan is not always clear. The school responded positively to a recommendation of the previous inspection and has rationalised the committee structure with improved communication between different groups. This has been a key contributory factor in fostering a greater sense of cohesion and empowerment for staff throughout the school.

- 5.9 Pastoral leadership is excellent, and since the previous inspection the tutor system has been revised to ease pressure on housemistresses. Each pupil now has a tutor who is involved in the life of the house, and this has further enhanced the academic and personal support given to pupils enabling the school to meet its stated aim of developing each pupil's talents.
- 5.10 The senior leadership team fully recognises its responsibility in monitoring and developing the quality of teaching and learning across the school. This is also fully embraced by academic leadership and management teams at all levels. The sharing of good teaching practice, mutual lesson observations and marking audits are increasingly commonplace both within and across academic departments. Departmental budgeting is now well established, thus meeting one of the recommendations of the previous inspection.
- 5.11 The system of staff appraisal is effective and identifies professional development targets for each member of staff over a two-year cycle. Senior leaders are aware that the system is not fully developed, and does not currently include fully the appraisal of each individual teacher's tutoring responsibilities. Staff are actively encouraged to participate in continuous professional development which is increasingly provided within the school as well as through external specialists. The strong focus on professional learning within and across departments is fully embraced by staff at all levels. The school is committed to recruiting high quality staff who support the full boarding school ethos. Appropriate arrangements for checking the suitability of staff and governors are in place, and appropriate records are maintained.
- 5.12 The leadership and management of the committed team of support staff is excellent. They play a key role in the success of the school and the welfare of the pupils. All support staff are well trained for their respective roles in meeting the needs of pupils in a full boarding school environment.
- 5.13 The school has excellent links with parents, carers and guardians. Those parents who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire indicated an overwhelming level of satisfaction in all aspects of the work of the school. Throughout the school parents are given many opportunities to be involved in the activities and the work and progress of their children. Parents volunteer support and contribute to the extra-curricular programme of lectures and academic societies. During the inspection, pupils in Years 11 to 13 benefitted from a careers forum to which parents contributed.
- 5.14 Parents of current pupils and of prospective pupils are provided with all the required information about the school. In the pre-inspection questionnaire, the overwhelming majority of parents said the information about the school and its policies was readily

available which was confirmed by inspection scrutiny of the extensive website and the parent portal. An excellent series of handbooks and curriculum booklets provide parents with a clear overview of all aspects and areas of their child's school life. The prospectus and accompanying documentation gives helpful information to prospective parents. This information is also available on the school's website.

- 5.15 An informative newsletter is sent out twice a term and a full termly booklet of events is published. Any updates can be found on the parent portal's weekly calendar. Parents are invited to all school events and these are always extremely well attended as was seen on bonfire night during the inspection. Since the previous inspection, 'Forum Lunches' have been instituted which give parents the opportunity to meet the senior leadership team and heads of departments for conversation over an informal lunch. Another recent innovation is that every house has set up its own blog. Parents know each other well especially within the boarding houses of their children. A contact list, for those who wish to give that information, is posted on the parent portal.
- 5.16 Parents are well informed about the progress of their child by two written reports, one short and one long, and a parents' evening each year. These provide useful information about what has been studied, the level of achievement in each subject and how a pupil can improve. Each half term a tracking report with an achievement and effort grade is sent to parents. Targets are set for the future to enable progress. Parents are free to contact teachers, tutors or boarding staff by email at anytime to discuss the progress and welfare of their child. The school has an appropriate complaints procedure in place and any complaints are handled in line with that procedure.

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