



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

Regulatory Compliance and Educational Quality Inspection Report

Appleford School

January 2023

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School's Details

School	Appleford School			
DfE number	865/6008			
Address	Appleford School Elston Lane Shrewton Salisbury Wiltshire SP3 4HL			
Telephone number	01980 621020			
Email address	headspa@appleford.wilts.sch.uk			
Headmistress	Mrs Fiona Filkins			
Proprietor	Dr Peter Gardner			
Age range	7 to 18			
Number of pupils on roll	156			
	Day pupils	93	Boarders	63
	Prep	66	Seniors	88
	Sixth Form	2		
Inspection dates	17 to 19 January 2023			

1. Background Information

About the school

1.1 Appleford School is an independent co-educational day and boarding school catering for the needs of pupils with dyslexia and associated learning needs. Founded in 1988, the school has a Christian ethos and is located on an eight-acre rural site near Salisbury. The school is divided into three sections: the prep school for pupils aged 7 to 13; the senior school for those aged 13 to 16; and a sixth form where pupils are taught remotely. The school is proprietorial, with limited company status, and has an advisory board. A new headmistress took up her post in September 2022. Boarding in schools which provide for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is inspected by Ofsted and was not a focus of this inspection.

What the school seeks to do

1.2 The school aims to provide a safe, warm and caring environment that enables pupils to develop their talents, resilience and self-confidence and so to realise their full potential and to live worthwhile and independent lives.

About the pupils

1.3 Pupils come from a range of backgrounds and most live within a 50-mile radius of the school. Data provided by the school indicate that the ability of the pupils is below average compared with those taking the same tests nationally. All pupils have been identified as having SEND, including learning difficulties associated with dyslexia such as social, emotional and mental health (SEMH). There are 127 pupils with an education, health and care (EHC) plan. There are no pupils for whom English is an additional language (EAL). The school does not seek to identify pupils as being the most able in the school's population because it aims to focus provision on each pupil's individual learning needs.

2. Regulatory Compliance Inspection

Preface

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is approved by the Secretary of State to inspect schools which are, or whose heads are, in membership of the associations which form the Independent Schools Council (ISC) and report on the extent to which they meet the Independent School Standards ('the standards') in the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014. Additionally, inspections report on the school's accessibility plan under Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996. Inspections also comment on the progress made to meet any compliance action points set out in the school's most recent statutory inspection.

ISI inspections are also carried out under the arrangements of the ISC Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership.

This is a REGULATORY COMPLIANCE INSPECTION which was combined with an inspection of EDUCATIONAL QUALITY. The COMPLIANCE inspection reports only on the school's compliance with the standards. The standards represent minimum requirements and judgements are given either as met or as not met. All schools are required to meet all the standards applicable to them. Where the minimum requirements are not met, this is clearly indicated in the relevant section of the report and the school is required to take the actions specified.

Inspections do not include matters that are outside of the regulatory framework described above, such as: an exhaustive health and safety audit; compliance with data protection requirements; an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features; contractual arrangements with parents; an investigation of the financial viability of the school or its accounting procedures.

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 specifically in published reports in this document but will have been considered by the team in reaching its judgements.

Links to the standards and requirements can be found here: [The Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/education-independent-school-standards-regulations-2014).

Key findings

2.1 The school meets the standards in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, and associated requirements, and no further action is required as a result of this inspection.

PART 1 – Quality of education provided

2.2 The school's own framework for assessment confirms that teaching enables pupils to make good progress in the context of Part 1 paragraph 3(a).

2.3 Pupils take GCSE examinations in their final year at the school. The small numbers involved prevent reliable comparison with national averages, but inspection evidence confirms that teaching enables pupils to make good progress in the context of Part 1 paragraph 3(a).

2.4 The curriculum is documented, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work for the pupils and covers the required breadth of material. The teaching enables pupils to make good progress, encompasses effective behaviour management and is supported by suitable resources. A suitable framework for the assessment of pupils' performance is in place.

2.5 Pupils receive relationships education in the prep school and relationships and sex education in the senior school, except in so far as they are lawfully excused. The school has consulted parents and published a written statement of its policy which has regard to the relevant statutory guidance.

2.6 The standards relating to the quality of education [paragraphs 1–4] are met.

PART 2 – Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

2.7 Principles and values are actively promoted which facilitate the personal development of pupils as responsible, tolerant, law-abiding citizens.

2.8 The standard relating to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development [paragraph 5] is met.

PART 3 – Welfare, health and safety of pupils

2.9 Arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils by means that pay due regard to current statutory guidance; good behaviour is promoted; bullying is prevented so far as reasonably practicable; health and safety requirements are met, including those relating to fire safety; provision is made for first aid. Pupils are properly supervised; admission and attendance registers are maintained, as required, and there is a strategic approach to risk assessment. A disability access plan is in place.

2.10 The standards relating to welfare, health and safety [paragraphs 6–16], the requirement of Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010, and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996, are met.

PART 4 – Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

2.11 The school makes appropriate checks to ensure the suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors, and a register is kept as required.

2.12 The standards relating to the suitability of those in contact with pupils at the school [paragraphs 17–21] are met.

PART 5 – Premises of and accommodation at schools

2.13 Suitable toilet and changing facilities, and showering facilities where required by the standard, and appropriate accommodation for pupils' medical and therapy needs are provided. The premises are maintained to a standard commensurate with health and safety; acoustics and lighting are appropriate; water provision is adequate. Suitable outdoor space is provided for physical education and outdoor play.

2.14 The standards relating to the premises and accommodation [paragraphs 22–31] are met.

PART 6 – Provision of information

2.15 A range of information is published, provided or made available to parents, inspectors and the Department for Education. This includes details about the proprietor, the ethos of the school and the curriculum, and of the school's arrangements for admission, behaviour and exclusions, bullying, health and safety, first aid, details of the complaints procedure, and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year, and the provision for any with education, health and care plans or English as an additional language. It also includes particulars of the school's academic performance during the preceding school year, inspection reports and (for parents only) a report at least annually of their own child's progress. The safeguarding policy is posted on the school's website.

2.16 The standard relating to the provision of information [paragraph 32] is met.

PART 7 – Manner in which complaints are handled

2.17 Parental complaints, if any, are handled effectively through a three-stage process, (informal, formal and a hearing before a panel of three, one of whom is independent of the school). Each stage has clear time scales, and at the third stage the panel can make findings and recommendations which are communicated to the complainant. Records are kept appropriately, including of any action taken, whether or not a complaint is successful.

2.18 The standard relating to the handling of complaints [paragraph 33] is met.

PART 8 – Quality of leadership in and management of schools

2.19 The proprietor ensures that the leadership and management demonstrate good skills and knowledge, and fulfil their responsibilities effectively, so that the other standards are consistently met, and they actively promote the well-being of the pupils.

2.20 The standard relating to leadership and management of the school [paragraph 34] is met.

3. Educational Quality Inspection

Preface

The EDUCATIONAL QUALITY inspection reports on the quality of the school's work. It focuses on the two key outcomes:

- The achievement of the pupils, including their academic development, and
- The personal development of the pupils.

The headline judgements apply one of the ISI descriptors 'excellent', 'good', 'sound' or 'unsatisfactory'.

Where necessary, National Curriculum nomenclature is used to refer to year groups in the school.

Key findings

3.1 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.

- Pupils develop clarity and confidence in communication over time; in particular, they speak with ease and eloquence.
- Pupils demonstrate exceptionally positive attitudes towards their learning.
- Pupils achieve well in a broad range of activities beyond the classroom, for example in sport, creative and the performing arts.
- Pupils make rapid progress, achieving excellent academic and vocational successes taking into account their ages, starting points and needs.

3.2 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.

- Pupils develop a strong moral understanding, evident in their exemplary behaviour; they know how to deal positively with life's challenges.
- Pupils are highly resilient in overcoming the barriers to learning that they face individually. They demonstrate a strong empathy for the needs and circumstances of others.
- Pupils take on many leadership roles enthusiastically and successfully; they make a strong contribution to school life.
- Pupils' spiritual awareness and understanding are excellent.
- Pupils display a clear commitment to serving the school and the wider community.

Recommendation

3.3 The school is advised to make the following improvement.

- Improve pupils' learning skills still further by ensuring that all teaching challenges pupils to use their own initiative.

The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements

3.4 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.

3.5 Pupils attain high standards in relation to their starting points and particular needs. In Year 11, pupils complete GCSE and vocational courses in a range of academic and practical subjects with good levels of success attained in English and mathematics in 2022. The number of pupils in the school is too small for comparison of its GCSE results with national averages to be meaningful. However, examination results show a trend of increasing individual success in the last two years. The attainment of pupils of all ages and abilities demonstrates rapid progress in relation to their individual starting points. This is because activities and resources provided in lessons and one-to-one support challenge and interest pupils. They are generally well matched to pupils' individual needs and abilities. Leaders and members of the advisory board promote the school's aims and values extremely effectively because they ensure that all pupils develop their skills and talents and achieve well. In their responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire, most parents agreed that teaching enables their children to make progress. Inspection evidence from lessons and review of pupils' work supports this view. Individual pupils' levels of success vary but overall their outcomes indicate that pupils are resilient in overcoming their difficulties and individual barriers to learning. This is because of the effective learning approaches that the teaching, support and therapy staff teams help them to develop. For example, pupils are given individual support strategies to help them to organise their work. These help them to improve their concentration and the speed at which they process information. Occasionally, the pace of pupils' learning slows when activities are not always suitably challenging or do not provide enough opportunities for pupils to use their well-developed skills in directing their own learning.

3.6 Pupils enjoy success in a range of activities both within and beyond the school. They are keen to push themselves, sometimes beyond their projected abilities, to achieve well in creative, sporting and adventurous activities. For example, all Year 10 pupils participate in The Duke of Edinburgh's Award (DofE) scheme and regularly achieve success at bronze levels. Pupils enjoy preparing for and achieving success in national competitions in art. Several pupils have represented the school at national levels in sports, for example in athletics. In addition, pupils have competed successfully at county levels in cross country, rugby and swimming. In their comments in the questionnaire, a very small minority of parents did not think that the school provided a suitable range of extra-curricular activities. Inspectors found that pupils develop good skills in response to many opportunities to develop new interests. They take part successfully in a wide range of extra-curricular pursuits ranging from horse riding to horticulture and from skiing to singing. They achieve well in these areas because teachers and support staff provide a positive environment in which all pupils receive the help they need to promote their learning. This demonstrates success by leaders and governors in realising the school's ethos to ensure that pupils develop their skills, talents, resilience and self-assurance. These then enable pupils to lead worthwhile and independent lives. In 2022, all pupils who left the school went into further education or training.

3.7 Pupils demonstrate a good range of skills, knowledge and understanding across the curriculum. For example, in a science lesson, prep pupils successfully recalled their previous knowledge of light sources, mirrors and printed protractors when conducting an experiment. They used the materials effectively and explained confidently their conclusions that reflection and incidence angles are equal. Pupils have developed good physical skills as a result of governors' investment in improved sports facilities and specialist coaching. In an extra-curricular badminton session, prep pupils of all ages demonstrated excellent hand-eye co-ordination skills when honing their rallying techniques. When making a carrot cake, senior pupils remembered accurately that they would need to sieve the flour to aerate it in order to make the cake rise. They also demonstrated an excellent understanding of food hygiene by ensuring that they always wore an apron to prevent germs finding their way onto the food.

3.8 As they move through the school, pupils become confident and clear communicators. They develop effective strategies to improve their oracy as a result of help from teaching and therapy staff. Senior pupils confidently listened to and read aloud short passages from *The Explorer's Daughter* by Kari

Herbert. They then thoroughly enjoyed debating the usefulness of the tri-colon in driving home a point. They showed their understanding that, by repeating three parallel words in succession, such as 'to dive', 'to leave' and 'to survive,' authors improve the impact of their writing. They then related this technique to the speaking styles of politicians and television presenters. Pupils develop proficiency in writing in response to highly effective teaching. Pupils' work demonstrates that they are able to make successful use of different writing genres for different purposes. For instance, prep pupils produced clear and succinct writing in summarising their findings following a science experiment.

- 3.9 Pupils' progress in numeracy is excellent. In food technology, senior pupils recalled their previous learning in mathematics confidently when costing a menu. They successfully calculated the cost of dishes and adapted the menus to fit a specific budget. Those with particular facility in numeracy strengthen their application of addition, subtraction and division because they are given more demanding work and suitably challenging resources. During singing lessons, pupils carefully counted the number of beats rest in the introduction before they started singing their song. In a physical education warm-up session, the team leader called out simple calculations which the rest of the class successfully computed in order to be selected for different teams.
- 3.10 Pupils develop excellent information and communication technology (ICT) skills. They successfully use ICT to enrich their learning across the curriculum. For example, older pupils set up a baking business successfully by applying their knowledge of spreadsheets and embed formulae to ensure that a balanced budget was established. Younger pupils confidently used specialist software to rewrite a story about buying toys. In photography, older pupils navigated an online platform confidently when snipping, highlighting, cropping, erasing and resizing different images. They successfully re-created published images for their examination project.

3.11 Pupils develop a comprehensive range of study skills as they progress through the school. For example, younger pupils used memory games to help to remember facts and figures when solving problems. Similarly, when preparing the song 'Part of your world' from the musical *The Little Mermaid*, pupils were able to successfully pinpoint and analyse the more difficult sections of the song. They broke these down into smaller sections for slow practice and then when secure, put them together successfully. In science, senior pupils accurately predicted that hydrogen gas is produced when magnesium ribbon and hydrochloric acid are combined, demonstrating their ability to hypothesise successfully. In GCSE photography, older pupils identified ways in which they might enhance their projects in order to meet the examination criteria more closely. They diligently researched the different grade descriptors to enhance their understanding. Similarly, in a personal, social and health education (PSHE) lesson on how to prepare for exams, pupils successfully shared and combined their ideas. They reached effective conclusions, such as agreeing that one of the best things they could do was to take regular screen time breaks the night before an examination.

3.12 Pupils' excellent attitudes to learning overall can be seen in classrooms and beyond. They are particularly evident in pupils' perseverance and readiness to collaborate productively with their peers. These attitudes are supported by consistent staff attention to pupils' individual needs. In geography, prep pupils collaborated well with each other in planning their own farm. They selected effectively the type of farming to focus on, for example, arable, mixed or pastoral, and in which part of the country to locate it. Pupils understand and appreciate that lesson planning keeps their needs in mind and they respond positively when challenging tasks are presented. For example, in a mathematics lesson on shape, pupils relished and benefitted from the opportunity to take responsibility for their own learning by choosing one of three different levels of work. Sometimes pupils do not demonstrate initiative in thinking beyond the immediate question or task they have been given. Pupils are successful in and enjoy their academic work because the therapy and counselling teams provide them with suitable strategies to maintain their concentration for learning. This results in pupils becoming confident and resilient in believing, rightly, that they can overcome barriers to their learning. These learning traits are further boosted by the knowledge that the senior team and staff are always very interested in their success.

The quality of the pupils' personal development

3.13 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.

3.14 Pupils show a deep respect for the non-material and spiritual aspects of life, often expressed in art and music. They appreciate how the personal challenges that they and their friends have faced have had a profound effect on what they consider important in life. This leads them to be very respectful of the feelings and perceptions of others. In discussion with inspectors, pupils described how they were deeply moved during the school's Remembrance Day Service. Here, they had reflected on the clay model footprints senior pupils had made to represent the sacrifice of local First World War soldiers who had died. Pupils reported that their appreciation was deepened through the two-minute silence followed by the playing on a bugle of the Last Post. In art, senior pupils thoughtfully studied sculptures by Yuan Xing Liang, Ellen Gewett and Nathan Sawaya. They reflected perceptively on the various surrealist techniques deployed and considered what the artists' might have thought of when they produced the works, such as depicting animals that turn into nature. During the inspection, pupils handling the school's therapy dogs, commented that the relaxed and friendly nature of the animals made them feel calm and happy. Throughout the day, pupils reflect usefully on their feelings and the beauty of nature in the many quiet spaces located in the school's extensive grounds.

3.15 Pupils' work on behalf of others, the school and the community is excellent. They take much pride in choosing several charities to raise money for, some based in the United Kingdom and some overseas. Pupils demonstrate a strong sense of duty and service, for example by collecting gifts and necessities for those people affected by the conflict in Ukraine. Involvement in these community activities helps pupils to develop empathy with others, particularly those less fortunate than themselves. Pupils

willingly take on posts of responsibility such as head boy and head girl, sports captains, prefects, school counsellors and anti-bullying ambassadors. They fulfil these roles effectively. Pupils demonstrate excellent levels of social development which reflect the school's aims and ethos, showing awareness of social responsibilities beyond home and school. They have a keen sense of the value of collaboration. For example, prep pupils successfully set up an eco-club and introduced initiatives such as re-using crisp packets in art, recycling clothes and installing water butts around the school site to redistribute rainwater. Pupils respond well to an environment that inspires them to make a positive contribution to their community and to their own personal development. Pupils make a positive contribution to the wider life of the school. For example, pupils were instrumental in their collaboration with staff in establishing a woodland learning environment. Pupils throughout the school are engaged positively and motivated well by the school's rewards system.

3.16 Pupils develop excellent levels of self-knowledge and self-assurance because the school helps them to feel valued as individuals. Pupils are enabled to control their reactions to situations and learn to maintain an emotional balance in their daily lives. They benefit from staff who help them to understand, interpret and regulate their feelings. Within and beyond the classroom, pupils approach tasks with perseverance, encouraged by a pervading 'can do' ethos. Pupils learn how to act decisively when faced with physical or mental challenges when completing tasks for the DofE Award. Across the school, pupils develop a variety of strategies to help them to learn and develop self-confidence through utilising these. In the questionnaire, most parents agreed that the school encourages their children to be more self-assured and independent. Inspection evidence supports this view.

3.17 Pupils demonstrate excellent appreciation of diversity, both with regard to different cultures and individuals' diverse characteristics. For example, in a PSHE lesson, senior pupils increased their knowledge and understanding of the influence of the environmental campaigner Greta Thunberg. They demonstrated tolerance of different points of view and empathy for the positive effect such campaigners have in bringing difficult issues to the world stage. They also strongly admired her success with regard to her age and recognised similarities between her experiences and their own with regard to SEND. Pupils display a mature appreciation of British culture by gaining knowledge about the historical development of literature, visual arts and crafts. In discussion with inspectors, pupils spoke openly and confidently about the nine characteristics that make individuals special and explained with clarity the contrasts between different types of relationships and partnerships. The senior pupils who are active in the identity club are highly articulate and influential role models for the school. In their responses to questionnaires, a small minority of pupils disagreed that pupils are kind and respect each other. Inspectors found that pupils are extremely tolerant of each other's differences and respectful of diversity within the community. They are prepared to have open discussions about religion, ethnicity, gender, sexuality and disability. Most parents who responded to the questionnaire agreed that the school actively promotes values of democracy, respect and tolerance of other people.

3.18 Pupils' moral understanding and sense of responsibility for their behaviour towards others are excellent. They are exceptionally respectful and courteous towards staff and their peers and develop very effective strategies to manage their own behaviour. For example, pupils know to go outside for a short break to relax, meditate and then return to the class if they are struggling with their emotions. Most parents who responded to the questionnaire agreed that the school actively promotes good behaviour. Inspection evidence supports this view and that pupils have a strong awareness of right and wrong. In a PSHE lesson, older pupils discussing a recent communication posted on a global online platform displayed a mature understanding in agreeing that the message was morally questionable. Some expressed discomfort with the language used and were clear why such behaviour was inappropriate. The school's anti-bullying ambassadors demonstrate excellent understanding about the causes and effects of bullying. Pupils' comments and behaviour logs confirm that bullying is extremely rare. Nevertheless, the anti-bullying ambassadors are proactive in deploying a range of strategies to raise awareness and offer support.

3.19 Pupils make wise and sensible decisions. They understand that key choices made in school will affect their future lives. For example, in a Year 9 tutor group session, pupils confidently discussed the difference between having dreams and goals. They also agreed that at this intermediate stage they were more focused on goals rather than careers. In their responses to questionnaires, a minority of pupils in Years 7 and above disagreed that they receive helpful advice about subject choices and careers. Inspection evidence, from interviews with pupils, shows that older pupils make very clear decisions about the next stages of their education; some had mapped out a clear strategy to pursue further study at university. Most parents who responded to the questionnaire agreed that the school offers helpful advice about subject choices and careers. Inspectors found that pupils respond well to provision for careers guidance that is well organised and matched to pupils' differing needs, enabling pupils to make sensible choices.

3.20 Pupils have an excellent understanding of how to stay safe online. They know not to give out personal details and to tell a trusted adult if they receive communication from strangers or bullying messages. This was reflected in their responses to the questionnaire in which almost all asserted that they know how to stay safe online. In discussion with inspectors, pupils accurately evaluated the dangers of using different forms of technology for a variety of purposes. Pupils have a good awareness of how to support their mental health and feel confident to discuss their concerns. For example, pupils know that when they are feeling sad or anxious or faced with a mental challenge, they can discuss their concerns with a trusted adult. This is because leaders and members of the advisory board are vigorous in promoting mental health with increasingly positive results. Pupils know that for a healthy lifestyle it is important to get enough sleep, eat a balanced diet, take regular exercise and practice relaxation techniques in order to manage stress and anxiety. For example, in a sports lesson, pupils demonstrated excellent understanding of the need to warm up before exercise. They knew how to do this effectively and safely demonstrating both static and dynamic stretches.

4. Inspection Evidence

4.1 The inspectors observed lessons, had discussions with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with members of staff, the proprietor, the chair of the advisory board, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended form meetings. Inspectors visited the learning support and educational resource areas. Inspectors considered the responses of parents, staff and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires. The inspectors examined curriculum and other documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Mr David Scott	Reporting inspector
Mr Stephen Holliday	Assistant reporting inspector
Mr Giles Brand	Compliance team inspector (Bursar, GSA school)
Mr David Bicker-Caarten	Team inspector (Headmaster, IAPS and ISA school)
Mr Ian Vallance	Team inspector (Deputy head, SoH and ISA school)