



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

EDUCATIONAL QUALITY INSPECTION

Newcastle High School for Girls

JANUARY 2017



SCHOOL'S DETAILS

School	Newcastle High School for Girls			
DfE number	391/6001			
Registered charity number	306983			
Address	Newcastle High School for Girls Tankerville Terrace Jesmond Newcastle Tyne and Wear NE2 3BA			
Telephone number	01912811768			
Email address	j.howe@ncl.gdst.net			
Headmistress	Mrs Hilary French			
Chair of trustees	Mrs Cheryl Giovannoni			
Age range	3 to 18			
Number of pupils on roll	825			
	Boys	0	Girls	825
	Day pupils	825	Boarders	0
	EYFS	60	Juniors	213
	Seniors	360	Sixth Form	192
Inspection dates	25 to 26 January 2017			

PREFACE

The registration authority for independent schools is the Department for Education (DfE), which directs inspection according to a specified frequency or at any time where the DfE has particular concerns about a school. The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is the body approved by the Secretary of State for the purpose of inspecting schools which are, or whose heads are, in membership of the associations which form the Independent Schools Council (ISC) and reporting on the extent to which they meet the Independent School Standards ('the standards') in the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

All association independent schools will have an inspection within three years from April 2016, in accordance with the Framework and DfE requirements. The inspection may be of COMPLIANCE ONLY or a combined inspection of EDUCATIONAL QUALITY AND COMPLIANCE depending on a number of factors, including findings from their most recent inspection. Schools judged not to meet the standards following their inspection may also be subject to a progress monitoring visit before their next routine inspection. The progress monitoring visit will judge whether the school has taken the necessary action to meet any unmet standards identified at their previous inspection.

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.

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 is an EDUCATIONAL QUALITY inspection, reporting 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.

Since the school was last inspected, the framework for inspection has changed. The current inspection framework uses different criteria and arrangements for grading from those used in previous inspection frameworks. The judgements made on this inspection are, therefore, not directly comparable to judgements made on previous inspections.

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 the published report but will have been considered by the team in reaching its judgements.

All inspections of independent schools in England are conducted according to the requirements of the Independent School Standards Regulations. However, different inspectorates apply different frameworks that are suited to the different types of schools they inspect. The ISI terminology reflects quality judgements that are at least equivalent to those used by the national inspectorate, Ofsted. ISI reports do not provide a single overarching judgement for the school but instead give a clear judgement about key outcomes for pupils and information on the quality of the school's work.

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

INSPECTION EVIDENCE

The inspectors observed lessons, conducted formal interviews with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with members of staff, the chair of governors and a representative from the Girls' Day School Trust (GDST), observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period and attended an assembly. Inspectors visited both the senior and junior schools, including the facilities for the youngest pupils. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined the curriculum and other documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Mrs Honoree Gordon	Reporting inspector
Mrs Alison Hedley	Accompanying inspector
Mr Adrian Boyer	Team inspector (Junior school headmaster, HMC school)
Mr Stephen Greenish	Team inspector (Former junior school headmaster, HMC school)
Mrs Pauline Edgar	Team inspector (Former headmistress, GSA school)
Mrs Ros Kamaryc	Team inspector (Headmistress, GSA school)
Mr Andrew Selkirk	Team inspector (Deputy head, Society of Heads school)
Mr John Sykes	Team inspector (Former director of studies, HMC school)

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1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

About the school

- 1.1 Newcastle High School for Girls is an independent day school for girls aged between 3 and 18. The school was formed in 2014, following the merger of two long-established local girls' schools, Central Newcastle High School and Newcastle Church High School.
- 1.2 The school is one of 26 owned by the Girls' Day School Trust (GDST). It is supported in its governance by a local advisory governing body. The current headmistress was appointed in 2014, being one of the former head teachers. This is the school's first inspection. The school comprises a junior school, including the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), at Sandyford Park on the city outskirts and a senior school in the neighbouring suburb of Jesmond. Since the school was formed, the junior school buildings have been extensively refurbished and in September 2016, the senior school was moved into newly-built premises.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.3 The school's aim is to provide a creative and intellectually challenging environment, where girls can thrive, feel safe to take risks and believe there is nothing they cannot achieve through hard work and self-belief. The school seeks to provide an all-round education, where girls have a broad range of opportunities to grow as individuals, discover and develop new interests and talents and acquire the skills necessary to become leaders and contribute positively to the world in which they will live. It strives to produce confident, respectful, courageous and caring individuals with strong core values, an awareness of their social responsibilities and the ability to establish lasting friendships. The school also aspires to create 'an education fit for the 21st Century', with a curriculum and facilities to meet the needs of education in the future.

About the pupils

- 1.4 Pupils come from a range of professional and business families, mostly living within a 25-mile radius of the school. Their ethnic backgrounds reflect those of the local area. Data provided by the school indicate that the ability of the pupils in the junior school is in line with the average. The ability of the pupils in the senior school up to and including Year 11 is above average. In Years 12 and 13, the pupils' ability profile is in line with the norm for pupils undertaking A-level courses.
- 1.5 There are no pupils in the school with an education, health and care (EHC) plan or a statement of special educational needs. The school has identified 50 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), mostly information processing difficulties, dyslexia or dyspraxia. Their needs are normally supported by their classroom teachers and they may be given extra time to complete their work. English is an additional language (EAL) for four pupils, who receive additional lessons to help them with learning English. The school does not identify any particular group of pupils as being more able.
- 1.6 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school.

2. KEY FINDINGS

2.1 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is good.

- Academic standards in the senior school are high, building on the strong foundations laid in the junior school.
- Achievement in extra-curricular activities, especially sport, is excellent.
- Pupils are first-rate communicators and confident without appearing conceited.
- Attitudes to learning are highly positive, with strong skills in collaborative working.
- Pupils are not always sufficiently challenged to make best use of their higher-level skills for learning.
- Pupils' progress is not always consistent because assessment systems do not track this effectively across both parts of the school.
- Pupils' information and communication technology (ICT) skills in the junior school are not fully developed because of inconsistent opportunities to apply them in lessons.

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

- All members of the school community are kind and supportive.
- Pupils display excellent interpersonal skills.
- Pupils show great empathy; respect for oneself and for others is a guiding principle.
- Pupils have high self-esteem and resilience.
- Excellent relationships between highly-committed teachers and pupils promote high levels of application and involvement in school life.
- Pupils rapidly acquire leadership skills through participation in the extensive range of extra-curricular opportunities the school offers.

Recommendations

2.3 The school is advised to make the following improvements:

- Ensure teaching strategies provide more challenge for pupils of all abilities, and opportunities to apply higher-level learning skills.
- Use assessment data and marking more systematically across the school to help individual pupils maximise their potential.
- Increase the opportunities for pupils in the junior school to apply their ICT skills to further enhance their learning in other subjects.

3. THE QUALITY OF PUPILS' ACADEMIC AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS

- 3.1 The quality of pupils' academic and other achievements is good.
- 3.2 Pupils' academic achievement is high, particularly at GCSE level, where their attainment is above the national average. Over half of the examination results in 2016 were A* or A grades. This represents rapid progress from pupils' starting points in the senior school. Pupils' attainment at IGCSE is above the world-wide average. Attainment at A-level is in line with the national average. Inspectors therefore judge that overall attainment is good; with a wider range of teaching strategies designed to offer pupils more challenge, some consolidation of recent curriculum initiatives in ICT and more effective use of assessment systems, there is potential for pupils' attainment to rise further.
- 3.3 Pupils progress well across the school because they are generally well taught and many lessons are expertly delivered. Almost all pupils responded in their questionnaires that they felt they were making good progress. Pupils with SEND and EAL are few in number in the school, but they achieve at least on a par with their peers. They benefit from the small class sizes, individual attention and support of their teachers, have more time to complete work and receive additional lessons to help them overcome their difficulties. In the senior school, teachers plan their lessons thoroughly to meet pupils' needs, but the quality of planning is less consistent in the junior school.
- 3.4 Achievement in extra-curricular activities, especially sport, across both parts of the school is excellent because they have ample opportunities to take part in a wide range of team and individual sports on a regular basis, building on the strong traditions of both predecessor schools. Participation rates are high and pupils are taught and coached well, leading to numerous successes at both national and regional level, with pupils competing and winning in several age categories. For example, the school are national finalists in netball, badminton, athletics and biathlon in more than one age category and are regional finalists for both hockey and netball, each in three age categories. Pupils are regional netball champions and regional finalists in athletics, badminton and tennis. Fourteen pupils represent England in a wide range of individual sports, including swimming, fencing, skiing, gymnastics, cycling, snowboarding and trampoline. Three junior school pupils represent their county in athletics.
- 3.5 In the creative arts, such as music, drama and dance, pupils achieve well because of the many opportunities the school gives for performance, and the high participation rates in such activities. Immediately prior to the inspection, pupils staged the musical *West Side Story*, with over 90 pupils taking part. Many pupils achieve success in music grade examinations, often at higher levels.
- 3.6 Pupils are fluent communicators, whether explaining web design or coding in an ICT lesson, drawing on appropriate technical vocabulary; comparing Mozart arias in music or eloquently sustaining a class discussion in history. The extensive extra-curricular programme offers numerous opportunities for pupils to develop their skills, for example in making presentations and in debates. This is recognised in success in external competitions in debating and poetry recitation.
- 3.7 A determined work ethic is an equally important factor in pupils' success. Pupils are self-motivated, with excellent collaborative working skills. In the junior school this was typically seen in a discussion on friendship and belongings, where pupils worked together to reflect and reach agreement on the relative importance of sharing with friends. In the senior school, collaborative working is the norm, including at A-level. Pupils' behaviour and concentration in class are excellent and, when given free rein, their independent learning skills blossom. The school aims to encourage pupils to 'have a go' and take a risk. However, in the senior school

this can depend on the skills and inclination of the teacher; they do not always stimulate pupils' independent thought and enquiry. At times, lessons are passive, with the somewhat muted responses and interactions from pupils impacting on their learning. This is reflected in the comments of a very small minority of pupils in their questionnaires that some lessons lack interest. The school culture leads pupils to be tolerant and open-minded. However, inspectors found that the skills of the teachers in stimulating and leading debate vary, as some of them miss opportunities to develop pupils' higher-order thinking skills. Nevertheless, relationships between teachers and pupils are excellent, resulting in a highly purposeful, but calm, atmosphere for learning. The participation and drive pupils display in sports teams and in striving to excel in individual sports admirably reinforce their work ethic.

- 3.8 Pupils' numeracy skills are good and are applied well across a wide range of subjects. This is an aspect the school is developing further, as demonstrated by their efforts to further develop the sixth form mathematics programme. As a result, increasing numbers of pupils now take the subject at A-level. Examples where pupils apply their numeracy skills within the taught curriculum are abundant, not only in economics and science lessons but also in wider activities, such as the Formula 1 challenge, the accountancy competition and the robotics and coding clubs.
- 3.9 Pupils' ICT skills are generally strong and they use these successfully in the senior school to enhance their learning in many subjects, reflecting the school's emphasis on this as an essential part of a curriculum 'fit for the 21st century'. For example, pupils draw on their skills for composing music in the new music studio; use a social account as a resource for preparing sixth form politics lessons; and refer to their mobile phones in biology to help prepare an essay on genetics. The regular use of laptop computers enables pupils to take control of their own learning, as seen in the senior school lesson on the topic of tourism, where pupils successfully used quick response codes to engage their peers in a quiz. Pupils' application of ICT skills in the junior school is inconsistent. They would benefit from a more systematic approach to increase the opportunities they are given to apply their skills across subjects in ways that enhance their learning. Older pupils, for example, used laptops and hyperlinks very effectively in ICT on the topic of evacuees in the Second World War. However, they also commented that they use them very rarely in other subjects.
- 3.10 Junior school pupils achieve well in both numeracy and literacy because of good teaching and the attentive support they receive from their teachers. The trust between pupils and their teachers creates a climate where pupils feel they can indeed 'take a risk' in their learning, and push themselves further. According to the school's own data, in 2016 over four-fifths of Year 6 pupils were working above national expectations in mathematics, reading, spelling, punctuation and grammar. The school is currently focusing on pupils' writing skills, in order to improve these to the same level.
- 3.11 Junior school pupils make good progress, as reflected in standardised measures of progress. However, the school does not yet use the data its systems generate to best effect, to show clearly how well pupils are doing at each stage across the year groups and to determine how to plan work that will accelerate the progress of individual pupils, including the most able. In their questionnaire responses, a few pupils noted some concerns regarding marking and knowing how they are doing. Inspectors agree that these aspects of assessment are inconsistent or underdeveloped across the school. In both senior and junior schools work scrutiny shows that the quality of marking is inconsistent: at times, it is helpful, giving pointers toward improvement, but occasionally it is more cursory.
- 3.12 Children in the EYFS achieve well against their early learning goals. They communicate freely and their skills in early numeracy are improving. Children in Nursery were easily able to count

to ten and they applied this well, working co-operatively together when preparing the bowls of porridge for the Three Bears. Children participated enthusiastically and accurately, singing along to songs about the days of the week on the interactive whiteboard. They play happily, independently and without always requiring close adult supervision. Plenty of space, good resources and clear staff expectations help to promote good learning and progress and children leave ready for Year 1.

- 3.13 Supported by a highly effective partnership with the GDST, who advises, monitors and encourages the school in equal measure, the school's leaders have done well to maintain academic standards through a period of significant change and uncertainty, with the merger of the two schools and the move into new buildings. The broad high-quality, creative curriculum, including music, art, dance and drama, encourages innovative approaches to teaching and learning which promote pupils' achievement and their personal development very effectively. Pupils achieve highly in the creative arts, for example. The junior school lessons in the woodland environment foster skills in building teams and collaborative learning. The provision of outstanding new facilities, including art and music studios, workshops, science laboratories and all-weather sports pitches, supports pupils' learning and achievement and means that the school is poised now to build on its strengths and fully realise its aims to provide an education 'fit for the 21st century'.

4. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

- 4.1 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 4.2 Personal development is notably strong, and pupils are quietly self-assured because the school environment and ethos is one of a mutually supportive community built on respect. This allows pupils' personal qualities and characters to blossom, in line with the school's aims. Pupils and staff tell you that this is the most important feature of the school, exemplified in the excellent relationships between staff and pupils and amongst pupils themselves. Pupils are clear that this provides the basis for their success. When asked what would be their lasting reminder of the school, a senior pupil typically said 'friendship'. The school's values are shared right across the school, at all levels. Pupils have a committed and positive approach to school life. Girls leave Newcastle High as confident, resilient and independent young women with self-belief and a 'you can do it' mind-set, reflecting fully the school's stated aims. The school as a community and 'family' is kind and supportive at all levels.
- 4.3 Pupils exhibit a finely-tuned awareness of the diversity of cultures and religions represented within their school and in their local community. An overwhelming majority of both pupils and parents feel that the school promotes respect, tolerance and understanding of those of other faiths and cultures. Equally, the school's leaders raise pupils' awareness of the risk of extremism, taking a leading role with local schools to keep up to date on these matters.
- 4.4 Pupils in the senior school talked animatedly and engagingly to inspectors about how they were helped to join the school 'family' and about their work in the community. Pupils show great pride in their school and are appreciative of the many opportunities and the considerable time and support given by staff to help them achieve, enjoy school life to the full and contribute to their school and wider community. Pupils exhibit well-developed cultural understanding, are highly tolerant and open-minded, mirroring exactly the school's principle of 'Respect to oneself and others'. Pupils from an early age onwards, often led by the more senior pupils, are extensively involved in raising funds for charity. Pupils' voluntary activities in their local community include support for a women's refuge and sufferers from dementia. The personal, social, health and education (PSHE) programme, together with pupils' involvement in the community, reinforces the school's values well.
- 4.5 The excellent personal development of pupils reflects the high priority the headmistress, governors and senior leaders accord to this. In their questionnaire responses, most parents were pleased with how well the school was led and managed and made many positive comments about the care their child receives, expressing strong agreement with the school's stated values. Parents showed great satisfaction with how well the strong pastoral team of heads of year and form tutors fosters their child's personal development, encouraging them to 'have a go' and try new activities or take on a responsibility, whilst supporting them when they face personal difficulties.
- 4.6 Pupils in both sections of the school are highly confident, without appearing arrogant or conceited. The extensive extra-curricular programme is designed particularly well to foster pupils' development overtly, through the provision of opportunities for leadership, for example in running clubs and activities or contributing to the pupil forum, allowing pupils to develop and display excellent leadership skills. Other activities more subtly deepen pupils' social awareness, empathy and sense of responsibility for others, as was evident in the short visits made by inspectors to a number of clubs and activities, such as debating, a transgender forum and fund-raising for charity. Pupils' decision-making skills are strong; they make well-reasoned decisions after careful consideration of all the factors, honed through participation and leadership experience in activities. For example, through a lunchtime club, pupils are

organising a fashion show to raise funds for charity, taking a series of decisions with partners and stakeholders.

- 4.7 By the time they leave, pupils become determined and resilient young people, as the school aims for them to be. Pupils leave the senior school well-prepared for their future. In their questionnaires, a small minority of pupils commented adversely regarding the quality of provision for careers. Whilst this may have been the case in the recent past, the new leadership team has recently instigated a more exciting and relevant programme that now prepares pupils well for the choices concerning their future education and life.
- 4.8 These aims are successfully furthered through more formal means, such as participation in The Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme. Older pupils, led by the head girl and the team of prefects, provide excellent role models for the values the school seeks to promote, and for the importance of collaborative working. Younger pupils admire the example they provide, as inspectors noted when observing music clubs led by older pupils for younger ones. The school's 'buddies' system and the help they provide for a school in Africa are only two of the many ways in which pupils show their strong empathy and learn of their important responsibility towards others.
- 4.9 Pupils across the school are encouraged to take regular exercise and are highly conscious of the importance of healthy lifestyles. Junior school pupils in the gymnastics club performed a number of gymnastic skills, including cartwheels and head stands, to a good standard: good habits start early in this school. The excellent quality and choice provided at school meals encourage pupils in making healthy choices.
- 4.10 Junior school pupils are unfailingly well-mannered and enthusiastic about all aspects of learning because staff model well the behaviours that they seek. The PSHE programme and the '8Cs' (curious, confident, caring, composed, creative, communicative, collaborative and courageous) permeate the curriculum, successfully encouraging pupils to be considerate of others in all that they do and say. Pupils' excellent interpersonal skills and self-awareness are evident from a young age: older pupils in the junior school openly and confidently discussed their 'emotional barometer', found in their *Positive Book*.
- 4.11 The social skills of children in the EYFS are good: these skills develop rapidly because teachers encourage this openly, working in close partnership with parents. Children enjoy learning and get on well with each other. The staff provide excellent care for pupils and encourage their personal development well through play, benefiting also their physical development.
- 4.12 Pupil behaviour observed during the inspection was excellent. In interviews, pupils supported this but did indicate some problems at the time of the merger, which had been unsettling for them. As a result, a very small minority of both pupils and parents responded in their questionnaires that the school did not deal well with bullying and a small minority of pupils were not convinced that the staff treat them fairly. In discussions, pupils showed a high degree of empathy, commenting that difficulties in friendship groups can take some considerable time to resolve fully. Pupils speak out quickly to challenge perceived injustice, or bullying as the school successfully encourages pupils to 'have a voice'.