



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

**Regulatory Compliance Inspection Report
For Schools with Residential Provision**

The Chorister School

March 2020



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School's Details

School	The Chorister School		
DfE number	840/6001		
Address	The Chorister School The College Durham County Durham DH1 3EL		
Telephone number	01913 842935		
Email address	enquiries@thechoristerschool.com		
Headmaster	Mr Ian Wicks		
Chair of governors	The Very Rev Andrew Tremlett		
Age range	3 to 13		
Number of pupils on roll	156		
	Day pupils	136	Boarders 20
	EYFS	23	Pre-prep 27
			Prep 106
Inspection dates	11 to 12 March 2020		

1. Background Information

About the school

- 1.1 The Chorister School is a co-educational independent day and boarding school for pupils aged between 3 and 13. Established at Durham Cathedral for over 600 years, the school was founded to educate the choristers who sing the daily services in the cathedral, and is an integral part of the cathedral foundation. The Dean and Chapter of the cathedral form the governing body with the Dean being the chair of governors. It is augmented by non-voting advisors, appointed to bring specific expertise to the school.
- 1.2 Since the previous inspection, a new headmaster and head of Pre-Prep and Early Years have been appointed, and day choristers were admitted for the first time in September 2018.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.3 The school aims to provide a first-class education through the provision of a broad and balanced curriculum enabling children to discover their talents and abilities and achieve their true potential. It strives to promote a strong Christian ethos and take a sensitive approach to the pastoral care of pupils. The school seeks to encourage generosity of spirit, citizenship, responsibility and respect for themselves, each other and the world in which they live.

About the pupils

- 1.4 Pupils come from a wide range of academic, professional and farming backgrounds, mostly from white British families; some local and some from significant distances away. Data provided by the school indicate that the ability of pupils is broadly average compared to those taking the same tests nationally. The school has identified 44 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), which include autistic spectrum disorder, dyslexia and dyspraxia, 26 of whom receive additional specialist help. One pupil in the school has an education, health and care (EHC) plan. No pupils have English as an additional language (EAL). Pupils identified by the school as being the most able in its population have the curriculum modified for them and pupils with special talents in music, art and sport are able to join activities aimed at developing these talents.

2. Regulatory Compliance Inspection

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. Accordingly, inspection records whether the school meets each of these standards, which are arranged in eight Parts, each of which is divided into separate paragraphs. The inspection of schools that have early years settings not requiring registration similarly records whether the school complies with key provisions of the Early Years Foundation Stage statutory framework, and for registered settings the full range of the Early Years Foundation Stage provisions is considered. Additionally, the inspection reports 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. It comments on the progress made by the school in meeting the compliance action points set out in the school's most recent statutory inspection.

This inspection also contains specific judgements on the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools ('boarding NMS'). It also comments on the progress made by the school in meeting the compliance action points set out in the most recent statutory boarding inspection and it judges the extent to which the school currently meets the boarding NMS. It identifies any standards which the school does not meet and requires action to meet them. Findings are distributed across sections relating to the eight Parts of the standards.

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, including the boarding NMS, 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 un-met standards identified at their previous inspection.

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 a COMPLIANCE ONLY inspection and as such reports only on the school's compliance with the standards, including the boarding NMS. 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 full regulations and requirements can be found here: [The Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#), [National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools](#).

Key findings

- 2.1 The school does not meet all of the required standards in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools, and relevant requirements of the statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage, and associated requirements, and should take immediate action to remedy deficiencies as detailed below.**

PART 1 – Quality of education provided

- 2.2 The school uses its own framework to determine attainment, instead of the national framework.
- 2.3 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.
- 2.4 The standards relating to the quality of education [paragraphs 1–4] are met.**

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

- 2.5 Principles and values are actively promoted which facilitate the personal development of pupils as responsible, tolerant, law-abiding citizens. Boarders' views are actively encouraged, and their opinions and concerns are appropriately considered by staff. Any prefect system operating in the school is suitably managed.
- 2.6 The standard relating to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development [paragraph 5] and NMS 17 and 19 are met.**

PART 3 – Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 2.7 In most respects 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.
- 2.8 An appropriate induction process for pupils new to boarding is implemented, and suitable provision is made for boarders' medical and health care, their food and drink and for managing boarders' laundry and possessions. Boarders have suitable contact with friends and family and access to a programme of activities. Boarding staff are appropriately trained and deployed.
- 2.9 The safeguarding policy and procedures are appropriate, and staff are suitably trained. However, recruitment checks on staff, including checks of identity, qualifications, references and medical fitness made as part of having regard to *Keeping Children Safe in Education* are not always carried out before staff commence employment at the school.
- 2.10 The standards relating to welfare, health and safety in paragraphs 9-16, the requirement of Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010, and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996 and NMS 2–4, 6-10, 12, 15 and 16 are met but those in paragraphs 7, 8 [safeguarding and safeguarding of boarders] and, for the same reason, NMS 11 [protection of boarders] are not met.**

Action point 1

- the school must ensure that all required recruitment checks, including the receipt of references, are carried out before the person commences work at the school [paragraphs 7(a) and (b) and 8(a) and (b); NMS 11; EYFS 3.7 and 3.9]

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

- 2.11 Visitors to boarding accommodation are appropriately supervised. The school does not make arrangements for guardianship.
- 2.12 The school has carried out many of the required recruitment checks to ensure the suitability of staff and proprietors prior to appointment. However, checks of medical fitness have not always been undertaken prior to the start of employment, nor has the identity of agency staff been verified. Cathedral staff are treated as supply staff and their checks are the responsibility of the Cathedral authorities.
- 2.13 Not all required checks, in particular checks on identity and qualifications, are recorded appropriately in the single central register (SCR).
- 2.14 The standards relating to the suitability of those in contact with pupils at the school in paragraph 20 [proprietors] are met but those in paragraphs 18, 19 and 21 and, for the same reason, NMS 14 [safe recruitment] are not met.**

Action point 2

- the school must ensure that before appointment it obtains and keeps a record of medical fitness for each member of staff [paragraph 18(2)(f) and (3); NMS 14.1; EYFS 3.9]

Action point 3

- the school must ensure that it obtains confirmation from agencies that all required checks on agency staff have been completed prior to commencing work at the school [paragraph 19(2)(b) and (e); NMS 14.1; EYFS 3.9]

Action point 4

- the school must ensure that it confirms the identity of all agency staff prior to their commencing work at the school [paragraph 19(2)(c) and (e); NMS 14.1 and EYFS 3.9]

Action point 5

- the school must ensure that all required checks are appropriately recorded in the SCR [paragraph 21(3)(a)(i) and (iv), 21(5)(a)(i) and (ii); NMS 14.1; EYFS 3.12]

PART 5 – Premises of and accommodation at schools

- 2.15 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. Boarding accommodation is adequate for the needs of all boarders, and safeguards and promotes their welfare.
- 2.16 The standards relating to the premises and accommodation [paragraphs 22–31] and NMS 5 are met.**

PART 6 – Provision of information

2.17 A range of information is variously 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. A suitable statement of boarding principles and practice is published by the school.

2.18 The standard relating to the provision of information [paragraph 32] and NMS 1 are met.

PART 7 – Manner in which complaints are handled

2.19 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, and identifying those relating to the boarding provision.

2.20 The standard relating to the handling of complaints [paragraph 33] and NMS 18 are met.

PART 8 – Quality of leadership in and management of schools

2.21 Appropriate leadership and management of boarding ensure that the required policies and records are maintained and effectively monitored.

2.22 The proprietors have not ensured that all recruitment checks are completed before staff commence employment at the school or that these are recorded appropriately on the SCR. As a result, they do not ensure that the leadership and management of the school demonstrate good skills and knowledge and fulfil their responsibilities effectively, so that all of the standards are met consistently, thus actively promoting the well-being of pupils.

2.23 The standard relating to leadership and management of the school in paragraph 34 and, for the same reason, NMS 13 [leadership of boarding] is not met.

Action point 3

- **the school must ensure that the leadership and management of the school demonstrate good skills and knowledge and fulfil their responsibilities effectively, so that all of the standards are met consistently, thus actively promoting the well-being of pupils [paragraph 34(1)(a), (b) and (c); NMS 13.3-13.5]**

3. Inspection Evidence

- 3.1 The inspectors observed lessons, conducted formal interviews with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with members of staff and with the chair of governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended form meetings. Inspectors visited boarding houses and the facilities for the youngest pupils, together with the learning support and educational resource areas. The responses of parents, staff and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined curriculum and other documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Mr William Ibbetson-Price	Reporting inspector
Mrs Rachel Edwards	Compliance team inspector (Head, IAPS school)
Mr Andrew Falconer	Team inspector for boarding (Head, IAPS school)