



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

Focused Compliance and Educational Quality Inspection Report

Durham High School for Girls

October 2022

Contents

School's Details	3
1. Background Information	4
About the school	4
What the school seeks to do	4
About the pupils	4
2. Regulatory Compliance Inspection	5
Preface	5
Key findings	6
PART 1 – Quality of education provided	6
PART 2 – Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils	6
PART 3 – Welfare, health and safety of pupils	6
PART 4 – Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors	6
PART 5 – Premises of and accommodation at schools	7
PART 6 – Provision of information	7
PART 7 – Manner in which complaints are handled	7
PART 8 – Quality of leadership in and management of schools	7
3. Educational Quality Inspection	8
Preface	8
Key findings	8
Recommendation	8
The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements	8
The quality of the pupils' personal development	10
4. Inspection Evidence	13

School's Details

School	Durham High School for Girls			
DfE number	840/6004			
Registered charity number	1119995			
Address	Durham High School for Girls Farewell Hall South Road Durham DH1 3TB			
Telephone number	0191 3843226			
Email address	principal@dhsfg.org.uk			
Principal	Mrs Simone Niblock			
Chair of governors	Rev Canon Michael Everitt			
Age range	3 to 18			
Number of pupils on roll	324			
	Pre-prep	19	Prep	75
	Seniors	176	Sixth Form	54
Inspection dates	11 to 13 October 2022			

1. Background Information

About the school

- 1.1 Durham High School for Girls is an independent day school for female pupils, overseen by a governing body. Originally opened in 1884 in the centre of Durham, the school moved to its present site on the outskirts of the city in 1968, retaining its Church of England foundation. Since the previous inspection, the school has been restructured and now consists of three sections. The pre-prep is for pupils aged 3 to 7 years, the prep department is for those aged 7 to 11, and the senior department caters for pupils aged 11 to 18. A new chair of governors was appointed in March 2022. The heads of the prep and pre-prep departments took up their posts in September 2022.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.2 The school's aim is to create a friendly, caring community based on Christian principles where each individual is valued. The school seeks to develop the potential of every pupil in all areas of life and to encourage academic excellence and a life-long love of learning.

About the pupils

- 1.3 Pupils come from a wide range of backgrounds and live within a broad area surrounding the city. Nationally standardised test data provided by the school indicate that the ability of the pupils is broadly average throughout the school when compared to those taking the same tests nationally. Two pupils have an education, health and care (EHC) plan. The school has identified 59 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities, 26 of whom receive additional specialist help. English is an additional language for 28 pupils, 2 of whom receive specialist help. The school identifies pupils who are more able in the school's population, and the curriculum is modified for them and for those pupils who demonstrate special talents in the creative arts and sports.

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. Inspections of schools with early years settings not requiring registration also report whether the school complies with key provisions of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory framework. 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 FOCUSED COMPLIANCE INSPECTION which was combined with an inspection of EDUCATIONAL QUALITY. The FOCUSED 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. In this focused compliance inspection, key standards have been inspected in detail. These are the standards on safeguarding; measures to guard against bullying; arrangements for pupils' health and safety; arrangements to check the suitability of staff; the provision of information; the handling of parents' complaints; and other related aspects of leadership and management. The remaining standards and requirements are deemed to continue to be met unless evidence to the contrary has been found.

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](#), [Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework](#).

.

Key findings

- 2.1 The school meets the standards in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, and relevant requirements of the statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage, and associated requirements, and no further action is required as a result of this inspection.**

PART 1 – Quality of education provided

- 2.2 In the prep department, 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 In the senior department, the school's GCSE and A-level results in the years 2019 to 2022 confirm 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 department and relationships and sex education in the senior department, 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 make excellent progress and achieve highly in both academic and other areas.
 - Pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding are excellent across all areas of learning.
 - Pupils of all ages are excellent communicators who listen well and express themselves articulately both orally and in writing.
 - Pupils demonstrate excellent study skills. Their attitudes to learning are outstanding and underpin the high levels of achievement throughout the school.
- 3.2 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- Pupils display an extremely strong moral awareness and have a clear understanding of right and wrong.
 - Pupils show outstanding levels of respect; they value diversity and demonstrate sensitivity and tolerance towards others.
 - Pupils' social development is excellent; they collaborate extremely well in lessons and extra-curricular activities.
 - Pupils make an excellent contribution to the life of the school, the local community and the world beyond.

Recommendation

- 3.3 The school is advised to make the following improvement.
- Ensure pupils of all abilities achieve the highest standards possible through the consistent provision of appropriate levels of challenge in lessons.

The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements

- 3.4 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.
- 3.5 Throughout the school pupils make excellent progress over time and achieve highly in all areas, thus fulfilling the school's aim to encourage academic excellence and a life-long love of learning. Pupils' excellent levels of success are well supported by the high quality of teaching they receive. Achievement in public examinations has been consistently high for the last three years. In 2022 nearly half of GCSE examinations sat were awarded the top two grades, while over two thirds of A level

examinations were graded A or A*. The majority of the sixth form enter the Extended Project Qualification and, in most years, around half have obtained the highest grade. Most pupils proceed to university, with some obtaining places at universities with very selective entry requirements. In the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), children make rapid progress in relation to their starting points, thus reaching or surpassing national age-related expectations by the end of Reception. Pupils with SEND make equally good progress as other pupils, and often outperform expectations, benefitting from the effective specialist support they receive. Excellent progress was seen in lessons, as when EYFS children rapidly assimilated the French names for various colours and learned to relate them to everyday items. Older pupils swiftly grasped the concepts involved in solving quadratic equations and applied these techniques to complex and unfamiliar mathematical problems. Almost all parents and most pupils who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire agreed that teaching enables pupils to learn and make progress.

- 3.6 Pupils are highly successful in an extensive range of creative and physical pursuits and are supported in their achievements by the wide-ranging extra-curricular programme, and specialist sports coaching. Pupils develop their excellent skills beyond the classroom in response to their teachers' encouragement and challenging enrichment activities. Pupils are successful in individual external music examinations. Drama is an important part of school life with many pupils enjoying success in speech and drama examinations and in school plays. School teams of all ages are successful in a variety of local and national competitions, and pupils represent regional teams in a range of sports, including netball, hockey and tennis. Pupils have also enjoyed success in a wide range of national competitions, including biology and chemistry olympiads, debating competitions and a national competition for budding entrepreneurs.
- 3.7 Pupils develop excellent knowledge, skills and understanding across all areas of learning. School leaders contribute to the success of the pupils by creating an ethos which supports and encourages pupils and staff in the pursuit of academic success. In a senior textiles class pupils showed excellent understanding of techniques used to create designs by picking out visual clues such as angles, colours and lines to correctly identify whether the artist was male or female. In a GCSE music lesson pupils demonstrated very good understanding of the key terms for analysing classical music. Pupils think deeply about issues in response to well-chosen probing questions, informed by strong subject knowledge. Pupils who spoke to the inspectors said that they feel that support and encouragement from their teachers helps them to become better learners. They show a good understanding of their previous learning and an ability to apply this knowledge to new situations. This was seen in a sixth form chemistry class where pupils successfully applied previously learnt information on atomic structure to solving complex questions. However, on occasions the level of work set was not sufficiently demanding to provide an appropriate level of challenge, particularly for the more able.
- 3.8 Pupils' communication skills are excellent throughout the school. They are confident and articulate speakers, and enthusiastically embrace opportunities for public speaking, such as in drama or when presenting reports in assemblies. Pupils eloquently participate in class discussion, and in interviews and informal discussions expressed their views with maturity and confidence. They are fluent and expressive when reading aloud in lessons and broaden their understanding through engaging classroom texts and books from the school library. Reception children have a good understanding of the sounds letters make and their writing and speaking skills develop rapidly as they grow in confidence and maturity. As pupils progress through the school, they learn to write with increasing fluency and sophistication through many opportunities for free writing. Younger pupils showed an excellent understanding of imperative verbs when writing instructions for making a sandwich. Sixth form essays discussing the effectiveness of parliament as a check on government demonstrated excellent imagination, a wide vocabulary and accurate use of grammar. Pupils use technical language confidently and competently, seen in a GCSE maths lesson when pupils used sophisticated language to explain their methods for solving complex problems. From an early age pupils learn to listen closely to their teachers and to each other. This was seen in an English lesson where prep pupils listened carefully to each other when discussing the traits of a character in the book *Goodnight Mr Tom*. In a

sixth form religious education (RE) lesson pupils listen closely and responded well to questions concerning Aristotle's approach to reality.

- 3.9 Pupils have highly developed study skills, hypothesising, analysing and synthesising across the curriculum, encouraged by well-directed questions from their teachers. Inspectors observed many opportunities for and examples of analytical thinking. This process begins in the EYFS where children learn to make basic hypotheses and to reason. When studying days of the week, they worked out that it couldn't be Sunday because they don't come to school on Sundays. Older pupils made very sensible prediction about the effect that changing gears on a bicycle would have on speed and effort. Pupils in a GCSE lesson showed excellent analytical skills when studying a text about the changing fortunes of 'cowtowns' in the USA. Sixth form pupils showed mature reasoning skills when analysing the use of language in *The Great Gatsby*. Pupils develop excellent research skills through a range of independent tasks with an element of choice, such as when young senior department pupils explored symbolism while studying *The Boy in Striped Pyjamas*.
- 3.10 Pupils are very competent mathematicians, successfully using their excellent calculation skills across the curriculum. Children in the EYFS count with confidence up to 10 and back to zero. Younger pupils are secure in their understanding of place value and could predict the next number in a sequence. Older pupils demonstrate outstanding mathematical reasoning, as seen when those in a GCSE group factorised and expanded quadratic equations to determine points on a curve. More able mathematicians compete successfully in national mathematical competitions. Pupils are comfortable using their skills across a wide range of other subjects such as when sixth form pupils competently manipulated formulae in chemistry to determine percentage yields.
- 3.11 Pupils of all ages competently use a broad range of information and communication technology (ICT) skills, as well as specific computing skills such as coding. The range and complexity of their skills increase as they move through the school, benefiting from the governors' investment in ICT resources. Children in the EYFS used the interactive whiteboard with easy familiarity when moving buttons onto a gingerbread man. Young prep department pupils showed considerable skill when using a digital note taking application to record the results of their online searches. Older pupils are adept at word processing, creating presentations and using spreadsheets to analyse data, as was seen in geography A level projects. These incorporated maps, photographs and diagrams to produce a very professional end document. In a sixth form computer science lesson pupils used sophisticated programming language to create high level gaming apps.
- 3.12 Pupils are enthusiastic and ambitious learners, with a genuine desire to succeed. They are curious and willing to learn new skills and take a pride in their achievements, as evidenced in their neatly presented and well-organised work. Encouraged by excellent relationships with their teachers, they are not afraid to take risks, recognising that making mistakes is part of the learning process. Pupils are resilient and confident in the classroom, approaching every task willingly and with high degrees of motivation. Children in the EYFS were extremely focused on a game of colour bingo conducted in French, maintaining high levels of concentration and perseverance for their age. Throughout the school pupils challenge each other's ideas in a constructive way whilst being supportive and respectful of each other's views. This was seen in a GCSE drama lesson where pupils working on a scene from *The Crucible* adapted their acting in response to suggestions from their peers.

The quality of the pupils' personal development

- 3.13 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 3.14 Pupils are highly self-disciplined, and their personal development is characterised by excellent standards of behaviour and respect, both towards each other and adults. In interview, pupils reported that there was hardly any bullying, and that they are able to resolve any issues which arise through the school's effective pastoral care systems. Pupils develop strong relationships with each other in response to the ethos of the school, which is based on mutual respect, and kindness. They support

and understand the school rules and the class charters they have drawn up. The development of their moral values begins in the EYFS where children learn to share, take turns and be polite to staff and each other. For example, young children responded positively when reminded about taking their turn and putting up a hand to answer. In discussions, pupils articulated a clear understanding of right and wrong. In a PSHE class pupils held a mature discussion about consent and what constitutes a respectful relationship. From the youngest age they are very mindful of the well-being of others and are considerate and caring in their relationships with peers and adults. Almost all parents and all pupils agreed that the school actively promotes and expects good behaviour.

- 3.15 Pupils show great respect for others and strongly support the great value the school places on the importance of doing so. They show an excellent appreciation of the cultural diversity that surrounds them at school and within their local communities. Pupils acquire a strong understanding of different faiths and cultures through their RE lessons. Almost all parents and pupils who responded to the questionnaire felt that the school encourages an atmosphere of respect and tolerance. Pupils develop a thorough knowledge of fundamental British values, such as respect for the rule of law and tolerance of others, through a comprehensive PSHE programme. In discussions, pupils showed an excellent understanding of what diversity, inclusion, and empathy mean in practice. They value not only themselves as unique and worthwhile people, but also others as well. The school culture, embodied by school leaders and governors alike, supports this by effectively promoting its ethos and expectations of tolerance and kindness to all.
- 3.16 Pupils' social awareness is excellent, and this helps to create an extremely happy community. Their relaxed relationships and social confidence are nourished by the school culture. This reflects the commitment by the governors and leadership to the school's ethos which values the unique individuality of every pupil. Children in the EYFS were observed socialising happily together and sharing toys at break times. Even the youngest children were observed working well with others when helping each other to sing *The snake is in the gras*'. Pupils collaborate well in lessons, as seen when sixth formers worked together to construct fractional distillation equipment for use in a chemistry experiment. They acquire excellent social skills through the many opportunities the school provides to engage with others in joint ventures. Pupils spoke very positively about working together as a team in sports competitions, or when planning their Duke of Edinburgh expeditions and the satisfaction of seeing their plans come to fruition. Pupils of all ages come to understand their own and others' emotions and how this can influence their actions and impact on those around them. All parents who responded to the questionnaire agreed that the school equips their child with the team working and social skills they need in later life. Most pupils who responded to the questionnaire said that the school helps them build positive relationships.
- 3.17 Pupils make a positive contribution to the school community through roles which include membership of one of the many school councils, prefects and well-being ambassadors. The active school council puts forward its own ideas for improvements in the school community. In response to requests, a bus shelter has been built in the car park, pupils may now wear trousers and beetroot smoothies have been added to the menu. Pupils are quick to stop and talk to anyone who is feeling lonely or sad. They show a mature understanding of how they can help those less fortunate than themselves. The interact club co-ordinates raising funds and providing practical support for a range of local, national and international charities. Pupils play an active role in the local community, volunteering to support local scout and guide groups, and running an outreach programme for local primary schools.
- 3.18 Pupils flourish and develop high levels of self-confidence through the positive encouragement they receive from class teachers and other staff who provide individual support. In interview pupils said that they felt very well prepared for the next stage in their lives. Almost all parents said that the school helps their children grow in confidence and independence. Pupils appreciate the helpful oral and written feedback they receive from their teachers, and say that it helps them understand what they need to do to improve. For example, GCSE biology pupils produced their own plans for improvement following internal examinations. Pupils develop resilience and perseverance from an early age.

Reception children showed great determination in their phonics lesson when practising writing. Older pupils showed resilience when tackling speed/time and speed/distance graphs, something many of them initially found very challenging.

- 3.19 Pupils develop decision-making skills from Reception, where children select which activity they will do in lessons and at breaktimes. Over time they become adept at making choices and are increasingly aware of the consequences of their decisions. Pupils are prepared to take risks and are not afraid to make mistakes, knowing that they will be supported in their learning journey. In interview they said that they understand the advantages of deciding to try something new, even if they find it hard. They think carefully about which activities to join, whether to be members of one of the school councils or which position of responsibility to apply for. Senior pupils make informed and mature decisions regarding which subjects they will study at GCSE and A level and sixth formers think carefully about their future career paths and whether to apply to university. Pupils make informed decisions about their learning. Those in a textiles lesson were able to choose their own designs while in a sixth form RE lesson pupils showed a sophisticated understanding of the need to make good decisions and the consequences of poor decision making.
- 3.20 Pupils exhibit a deep spiritual awareness. Pupils contemplate philosophical and ethical concepts thoughtfully. Younger pupils reflected carefully on their feelings following a study of the miraculous healing of Jesus described in the Bible, relating a range of emotions to personal circumstances. Older pupils considered their own potential and what is it that gives them purpose and helps them to flourish. Pupils have a strong appreciation of the non-material aspects of school life. Children in the EYFS greatly value their thinking time and mindfulness colouring, while older pupils spoke positively about the well-being room. Pupils of all ages demonstrate an appreciation of their own surroundings. Those who spoke to inspectors talked in particular about the high quality artwork on display around the school and the inspiring splendour of the nearby cathedral.
- 3.21 Pupils show a good understanding of how to keep themselves healthy and stay safe. Almost all parents and pupils who responded to the questionnaire agreed that the school encourages pupils to learn about and adopt a healthy lifestyle. From the nursery upwards, pupils understand the importance of eating a balanced diet. The school runs a 'nourish to flourish' programme which aims to educate pupils about healthy eating for both physical and mental health. Pupils are aided in making healthy eating choices by the ready availability of fresh fruit and vegetables at mealtimes. They discuss healthy lifestyles knowledgeably in PSHE lessons and understand how to care for their teeth. Pupils acquire skills to manage stress and maintain positive mental health through various relaxation sessions. All pupils who responded to the questionnaire agreed that the school teaches them about safety, including how to stay safe online, something which is regularly reinforced in ICT and PSHE lessons. Pupils appreciate the importance of physical fitness and enjoy both the formal sports programme and opportunities for recreation using the facilities provided. In interview, all could name numerous people they could talk to should they have any worries or concerns.

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 and with the chair of governors observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended assemblies. Inspectors visited the facilities for the youngest pupils, together with 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 William Ibbetson-Price	Reporting inspector
Mr Devin Cassidy	Compliance team inspector (Head, HMC school)
Mrs Rebecca Robertson	Team inspector (Former deputy head, IAPS school)
Mr Steven Pearce	Team inspector (Former head of faculty, HMC school)