



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

EDUCATIONAL QUALITY INSPECTION

THE CHORISTER SCHOOL

JANUARY 2017



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			
Headmistress	Mrs Yvette Day			
Chair of governors	The Very Rev Andrew Tremlett			
Age range	3 to 13			
Number of pupils on roll	195			
	Boys	124	Girls	71
	Day pupils	165	Boarders	30
	EYFS	31	Pre-Prep	35
	Forms 1-4	84	Forms 5-6	45
Inspection dates	18 to 19 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 and with the chair of governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended house meetings, evensong and assemblies. Inspectors visited boarding houses and the facilities for the youngest pupils, together with the learning support and educational resource areas. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined curriculum and other documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Mrs Diane Gardiner

Reporting inspector

Mr Richard Batchelor

Team inspector (Director of studies, IAPS school)

Mr Richard Evans

Team inspector for boarding (Head, IAPS school)

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1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

About the school

- 1.1 The Chorister School is an independent day and boarding school for boys and girls aged between 3 and 13. The Chorister School has been established at Durham Cathedral for over 600 years. Founded to educate the choristers who sing the daily services in the cathedral, the school is an integral part of the cathedral foundation. The school's governing body is ex-officio, with the Dean of the cathedral 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, the school has clarified the roles and responsibilities of the governing body and created accommodation for the middle school by taking over another building in the cathedral college. This has resulted in the relocation of several departments in the school and the refurbishment of many other areas, including the creation of a new reception area at the heart of the school. As part of the 600th anniversary celebrations, the play area was re-surfaced and a new alumni database was established. The curriculum has been broadened by the addition of Mandarin, Greek, critical thinking, rowing and equestrian sports.
- 1.3 The addition of an adjacent college building to provide accommodation for Years 3 and 4 has enabled all boarders to be accommodated in one house on the top two floors of the main building; one floor for girls and one for boys, each with separate accommodation for resident or overnight staff. Common rooms for boarders, including one for quiet activities, have also been developed. The choristers board full time and a newly introduced programme allows other pupils to board on a flexible basis.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.4 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 aims to encourage generosity of spirit, citizenship, responsibility and respect for themselves, each other and the world in which they live.

About the pupils

- 1.5 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. The school does not use standardised aptitude tests. However, its own assessment and use of standardised tests for English and mathematics, indicates that the ability of pupils is above average. The school has identified 35 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), which include autistic spectrum disorder, dyslexia and dyspraxia, all of whom receive additional specialist help. One pupil in the school has an education, health and care (EHC) plan. English is an additional language (EAL) for 12 pupils, two of whom receive support for the development of English skills. Data used by the school have identified a significant number of pupils as being the most able in the school's population for different subjects, and the curriculum is modified for them and for other pupils because of their special talents in music, art and sport.
- 1.6 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school. Where the school's own names differ from those used nationally, the details are given in the table below:

<i>School name</i>	<i>National Curriculum name</i>
Purple	Reception
Silver	Year 1
Gold	Year 2
Form 1	Year 3
Form 2	Year 4
Form 3	Year 5
Form 4	Year 6
Form 5	Year 7
Form 6	Year 8

Recommendations from previous inspections

- 1.7 The previous full inspection of the school by ISI was a standard inspection in February and March 2011. The recommendations from that inspection were:
- Extend the excellent practices seen in some departments of monitoring, evaluation and peer review to ensure excellence across the whole curriculum.
 - In the EYFS, improve integration between the Nursery and Reception children and enable staff to meet together regularly as an Early Years team.
 - In the EYFS, further develop a consistent system to track children's progress throughout the Early Years.
- 1.8 The recommendations of the intermediate boarding inspection in May 2013 were:
- Extend opportunities and resources for older boarders to spend some time on their own if they so wish.
 - Record in greater detail the discussion and the actions taken by governors in carrying out their annual review of the school's safeguarding practices.
- 1.9 The school has successfully met all the recommendations of the previous inspections. Further detail is given in the main text of the report.

2. KEY FINDINGS

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

- Pupils demonstrate a high rate of progress throughout the school, culminating in excellent academic attainment.
- Pupils achieve highly across a broad range of activities including music, a wide range of sports, public speaking and drama.
- Pupils' attitudes for learning and application of higher-order critical thinking skills are extremely well developed for their age.
- The formal assessment process does not yet include a baseline from which to track future progress.

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

- Pupils are confident, highly motivated and demonstrate excellent levels of independence and self-awareness.
- Pupils develop the skills to make decisions about their lives and their learning from a very early stage.
- Pupils demonstrate an exceptionally strong sense of responsibility for themselves and others.
- Pupils are excellent role models and ambassadors for the school.

Recommendations

2.3 In the context of the excellent outcomes, the school might wish to consider:

- Develop the current process of formal assessment to include a form of aptitude testing in order to establish a baseline from which future progress can be measured and appropriate challenge provided.
- Develop the outdoor spaces for the EYFS and Key Stage 1 to provide greater opportunities for independent learning.
- Explore opportunities for senior boarders to have regular access to technology in the evenings to give them further opportunities for independent research.

3. THE QUALITY OF PUPILS' ACADEMIC AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS

- 3.1 The quality of pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.
- 3.2 The school successfully meets its aim to provide a first-class education with a broad, participative and balanced curriculum that enables all pupils to achieve their true potential and reach the highest standards in everything they undertake. As a result, pupils of all ages make excellent progress as they move through the school. The school does not take part in national curriculum tests, but the available evidence, including that of standardised tests, shows attainment to be high in relation to national age-related expectations. Pupils have achieved increasingly good results in selective senior school entrance examinations, and a significant number of them have received awards and scholarships for academic success, music and art.
- 3.3 Pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) make excellent progress from their starting points. Their particular interests and aptitudes are recognised at an early stage and used to develop a programme of interesting and engaging activities to personalise their learning. Their progress is carefully tracked and where appropriate, effective interventions are put in place to support and reduce any gaps that are evident. Children enjoy their learning and quickly develop skills that help them understand that they can make their own decisions. For example, pupils chose which materials to use as they designed and built bridges for their gingerbread man to cross over on his journey. Regular and comprehensive communication and review, involving all staff, ensures that they understand every child's particular strengths and areas for development and that they are carefully tracked and addressed appropriately. This meets the recommendations from the previous report.
- 3.4 Throughout the school, pupils with SEND or EAL are exceptionally supported to achieve highly in relation to their starting points. When areas of concern are identified, the specialist staff undertake classroom observations, provide specific diagnostic testing and prepare an individual learning plan for each pupil. Progress is then tracked carefully and specialist staff provide effective support, both during lessons and in one to one or group sessions. More able pupils are effectively challenged in class to extend their own learning and undertake research projects in their own time. Subject staff are particularly skilful in providing appropriate challenge and allowing pupils time to consider their approach to a task. As a result, pupils become independent, resilient and confident learners who are prepared to test their ideas and progress well as a result. In the lessons and activities observed, pupils demonstrated perseverance and adaptability.
- 3.5 From the EYFS onwards, pupils learn to reflect upon and review their work in order to improve their learning. Consistently useful marking and oral feedback by teaching staff challenges understanding, drives improvement, and celebrates work of a high standard by making it clear what has worked well. Pupils confidently expressed the opinion that day and boarding staff were always willing to give freely of their time to work with them individually to ensure a deeper understanding of what they need to do to improve.
- 3.6 Throughout the school, pupils are highly articulate. They question confidently and express their ideas and views intelligently. Younger pupils used subordinating conjunctions to add information to their sentences and older pupils demonstrated a high level of communication as they deconstructed language and identified the Latin roots of common English words. Extended writing is a strength of the school which develops rapidly year on year, culminating in the oldest pupils using wide-ranging vocabulary, varied sentence structures and thoughtful use of punctuation as they explored the journey of the wise men and compared the intelligence of humans with that of certain animals. Opportunities to debate complex concepts abound from an early stage. At an early stage, pupils test the reliability of primary sources as they find

out about the fire of London and older pupils articulately question and share how they personally picture God. Pupils are encouraged to pursue their own interests at a high level and are given the time and space in which to do so, for example when preparing for challenging musical performances or developing their skills for their particular sporting endeavour.

- 3.7 Mathematical skills are well developed throughout the school. Pupils understand and manipulate numbers with confidence; the youngest pupils in the prep school confidently use number lines to support their addition of three numbers, recognising patterns and doubling and halving numbers to reach the answers. Older pupils showed resilience as they applied their mathematical knowledge when problem solving, recognising which operations would be needed. Good application of mathematical skills was seen in science lessons, as scatter graphs were created and reviewed. From an early stage, pupils are challenged to compete in mathematical challenges against other schools.
- 3.8 Pupils of all ages confidently manipulate and apply their well-developed ICT knowledge and skill to extend their learning. From the earliest stages, pupils confidently record their own research using presentation software and make it more interesting by using transitions and different fonts and colour themes. Senior pupils are fully integrated into the digital world and show that they are adept at programming, word processing and coding on desktop computers or tablets. As they move through the school, pupils increasingly use the wide range of ICT resources and other sources of information, such as the library, to develop their ability to analyse the results of their research and synthesise their findings to enhance their understanding. Boarders do not currently have regular access to ICT in the evenings, limiting their ability to undertake research of their own.
- 3.9 Pupils of all ages develop exceptional musical, artistic and dramatic skills. The strong links with the cathedral and ready access to world-class musicians ensures that every pupil has opportunities to develop their musical skills to a high level. The numerous choirs and instrumental groups have many opportunities to perform and share their experiences with pupils from other local schools through the music outreach programme. Committed and innovative teaching allows pupils to build their skills in the creative arts and apply them across other areas of the curriculum. Pupils across the age range have recently gained awards in local and national art and photography competitions and all pupils have the opportunity to display their work in a professional way in an outside gallery and around the school. Pupils enjoy many opportunities to participate in assemblies and concerts in the local area. This ensures that, at all stages, they are confident and capable performers, as was witnessed during a rehearsal for the middle school production, an Evensong service in the cathedral and a Galilee Choir rehearsal. A high percentage of pupils in the upper school learn to play at least one, if not two, musical instruments, demonstrating high levels of skill for their age.
- 3.10 As they mature, pupils develop their sporting abilities to an increasingly strong level. Increased opportunities to develop their skills for a range of sports, such as the newly introduced girls' hockey tour, and specialist teaching has resulted in the school teams achieving good results in local and national tournaments.
- 3.11 Since the previous inspection, the range of opportunities for extra-curricular activities has been strengthened and extended. The programme now provides pupils with many options to develop activities and their own interests to a high level. The excellent opportunities to take part in individual sports, such as rowing and riding, has resulted in raised self-esteem for many pupils, for whom team sports are less attractive. Speech and drama activities enable pupils to achieve highly in external examinations.

- 3.12 Pupils' attitudes to learning are exemplary. They approach their work and play with an infectious good humour, are highly enthusiastic and motivate themselves and their peers in their learning. They enjoy opportunities to take the initiative and show mature levels of independence from the earliest stage. As a result, they demonstrate very well-developed abilities to control, reflect upon, and take their own learning forward; they are willing to take risks and celebrate their own and others' success. This was seen as the very youngest children played in the role play area, acting out stories and sharing out parts. In science, the oldest pupils demonstrated higher-order thinking skills and collaboration as they planned an experiment to demonstrate the difference between the speed of light and sound.
- 3.13 The vast majority of parents who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire were particularly satisfied with the range of subjects provided within the curriculum and the high levels of teaching throughout the school. A very small minority of parents felt that they did not receive sufficient information about their child's performance and progress. The inspection team reviewed the process for providing feedback to parents and concluded that the level of information was timely and included all the necessary content.

4. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

- 4.1 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 4.2 As they progress through the school, pupils develop exceptionally high levels of self-esteem. By the time they leave the school, they are happy and secure with who they are and have developed a level of maturity beyond that expected for their age. The highly committed and caring boarding and day staff have been successful in providing a warm and welcoming environment that underpins the aim of the school to promote a strong Christian ethos, drawing inspiration from its close relationship with the cathedral and taking a sensitive approach to the pastoral care of pupils. Through a well-structured personal, social and health education (PSHE) curriculum, a thoughtful assembly programme and a very wide range of opportunities for pupils to take on responsibilities within the school community, pupils develop confidence, flexibility and resilience. They know that staff will treat them as individuals and that they will be well supported even when they get things wrong.
- 4.3 From the EYFS onwards, pupils have a very clear awareness of cause, effect and consequence. They make decisions on a daily basis, such as how to use their free time, how to deal with friendship issues and how to take responsibility for their own actions. By taking on increased responsibility as they get older, pupils develop an awareness of how their decisions affect themselves and those around them. Their increased ability to organise themselves and mentor the younger pupils helps them to develop excellent organisational skills which they use to good effect as they gather the ideas of their peers for school council meetings and help to run house meetings. Here, decisions are made that have a positive effect on their school and the local community, as they decide which charities to support, how they will raise money for those fundraising activities and what positive changes to make to the organisation of the school, such as the inclusion of more equipment in the play area.
- 4.4 The Christian ethos prevails throughout the school, and is evident in the pupils' ability to reflect upon and articulate their thoughts on faith and spirituality in its broadest sense. This was exemplified in the way that pupils expressed their enjoyment of the sense of community in the school, the space for peace and quiet that is provided in assembly or in the cathedral and the natural way that pupils support and consider the feelings of others. Within the school's open-ended learning environment that encourages curiosity, pupils increase their knowledge of the difference they can make to preserving the diversity of the planet and the natural world.
- 4.5 From an early age, pupils develop an innate sense of right and wrong and a strong moral compass. They are aware that communities need to abide by a set of simple rules to ensure the well-being of all its members. As a result, behaviour in the school is exemplary. The boarders benefit greatly from the warm family atmosphere in the boarding house, where they learn how to live with others and share their experiences in a safe and supportive community. Pupils have a deep understanding of the needs of others and are strongly supportive of each other and of the school as a whole. They generally respect the system of reward and sanction and work with staff to ensure a happy and safe environment through the very successful house system. In the questionnaire, a very small minority of pupils felt that staff were not always fair in the way that they gave out sanctions and rewards. Scrutiny of the system for the recording of these, and discussions with pupils during the inspection, showed that regular monitoring ensures that staff reflect regularly on this aspect of school life to improve the consistency of approach.
- 4.6 Pupils are socially aware and take their responsibilities for others very seriously. They work well together in lessons, at play and when preparing for a production or performance to enhance their learning and achieve common goals. The many opportunities they have to sing

together at a high level or organise a house team or charitable fund raising event ensure that they understand how collaboration results in the best outcomes. The very caring sense of community within the school and in the boarding house underpins the pupils' social development and awareness of their place within the wider world.

- 4.7 All pupils take pride in making significant contributions to the lives of others within the school, in the local community and further afield. Older pupils take on a wide range of operational roles in the school, such as organising pupils when they enter assembly, monitoring certain aspects of lunch and supporting the staff at break times. Older boarders also take on different responsibilities in the boarding house. Pupils develop an extremely good understanding of the nature of charity work through on-going support for a number of charities. The boarders choose their own charity each year and organise activities such as the Christmas jumper day to raise funds. Other events have provided funds for a charity supporting children with cleft palates. Pupils also contribute to the wider community by taking on roles within the cathedral itself and when working with pupils from local primary schools as part of the musical outreach programme.
- 4.8 Pupils respect and value the unique diversity within the school. An increasing awareness of world faiths, together with a regular sharing of festivals and customs with pupils from different backgrounds and religions, ensures that pupils are able to explore and challenge their own faith, as well as understand the opinions of others. Pupils actively enjoy welcoming their peers who come from different backgrounds and take pride in ensuring that they are confident and happy in their new surroundings.
- 4.9 Even the youngest children at the school develop a secure understanding of what constitutes a healthy and balanced lifestyle. They are keen to show that they make good choices at lunchtime, and ensure that their plate of food is a balanced one. The opportunities for exercise are numerous, ensuring that pupils develop a love of exercise in whichever way is most enjoyable for them. The personal, social and health education programme, which is delivered through tutor time, is a strong contributory factor to the excellent outcomes for pupils. The younger pupils learn how to recognise their different emotions and manage them effectively. The new programme to develop strong emotional and mental health is designed to give older pupils strategies to deal with the stress and strain of modern life, thus preparing them for the future. All staff are responsible for the pastoral needs of the pupils and the strong communication that takes place across the school ensures that all pupils' needs are understood and met.
- 4.10 A vast majority of parents who responded to the questionnaire were supportive of the way that the school does everything it can to ensure that their child learns in a healthy and safe environment, actively promotes good behaviour, and promotes values of democracy, tolerance and respect for those with different faiths or beliefs. A very small minority of parents felt that bullying was not always handled well. Inspectors scrutinised the anti-bullying policy, the record of serious sanctions and the records kept of all incidents. Inspectors found that the school takes bullying extremely seriously and monitors even the smallest incident to identify patterns and provide support and advice to all parties concerned.
- 4.11 Pupils are exceptionally well prepared for the next stage of their education. As they leave the school, they are ready to meet their next set of challenges as capable, resilient and confident young people.