

# School inspection report

16 to 18 April 2024

## **Newcastle-under-Lyme School**

Mount Pleasant

Newcastle-under-Lyme

Staffordshire

ST5 1DB

The Independent Schools Inspectorate is appointed by the Department for Education to inspect association independent schools in England. Our inspections report on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards and other applicable regulatory requirements are met, collectively referred to in this report as 'the Standards'.

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## Summary of inspection findings

1. Governors have an informed oversight of all areas of school life and ensure that leaders fulfil their responsibilities in meeting the regulatory requirements, including those in the early years setting. Leaders have consulted extensively with staff and pupils to evaluate the effectiveness of leaders' work. Subsequently, leaders have created a detailed development plan which is reflected in other documentation, including schemes of work and individual lessons plans.
2. The curriculum and co-curricular programmes meet the needs and interests of pupils. The curriculum successfully develops children's knowledge and skills in the early years. The recently introduced topic-centred curriculum in the prep school has effectively enabled pupils to explore their own interests and talents. However, currently the extent to which this is possible in lessons is limited by a lack of easy access to ways in which they can research areas of interest. The senior school curriculum is rich and broad, offering a range of modern foreign languages and media through which to study art. Sixth-form pupils select from a wide variety of examination subjects alongside non-exam courses.
3. Leaders have decided to emphasise the importance of the school's extensive co-curricular programme in developing pupils' skills and talents. Leaders track both pupils' participation and direct them to activities that will particularly promote their wellbeing. The extent and impact of the co-curricular programme on pupils is a significant strength of the school. It involves pupils of all ages, and covers intellectual, physical and creative activities. Prep school pupils develop outdoor skills in the school's off-site woodland area.
4. Teachers have secure subject knowledge and effectively develop pupils' understanding and skills. Teachers integrate the use of both assessment data as well as information about the needs of pupils, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) into the planning and delivery of lessons. Lessons are planned in detail and use a variety of approaches. Pupils are well engaged in their learning. Feedback in books and lessons is precise and valued by pupils.
5. Pupils are consistently respectful of those of different faith, national background or gender to their own. Male and female pupils enjoy equal opportunities in all areas of school life, including in sport.
6. Leaders' initiative to include all areas of pastoral support, safeguarding, and personal, health, social and economic (PHSE) under the umbrella of 'we thrive' has brought a coherent and consistent approach which support pupils as they move through the school. As a result, pupils show appropriate levels of confidence and personal development for their age.
7. The behaviour policy and anti-bullying strategy are understood by staff and pupils and are implanted effectively. Bullying is rare. Pupils are well behaved with the exception of some very occasional low-level chatting in lessons.
8. Buildings and grounds are well maintained. Those responsible ensure that risks to pupils are minimised through the systematic detailed checks of health and safety and fire procedures. The security of pupils is prioritised.
9. Pupils are kind and contribute to the lives of others both in school and the local community. Senior pupils have key roles in providing support and advice for younger pupils.

10. The curriculum programme provides up-to-date and accurate careers education across the age groups. Pupils value the individualised advice they receive, and in guiding their decisions about university or degree apprenticeship courses. Pupils receive a grounding in the understanding of financial and economic issues.
11. Safeguarding arrangements are effective in promoting the wellbeing of pupils. Effective pastoral care ensures that pupils at risk of harm are quickly identified and action taken. Safeguarding leaders liaise openly with external agencies and review the implementation of their procedures after any incident. All appropriate pre-employment and recruitment checks are made on adults before they come into contact with pupils.

## The extent to which the school meets the Standards

- Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance are met.
- Standards relating to the quality of education, training and recreation are met.
- Standards relating to pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing are met.
- Standards relating to pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society are met.
- Standards relating to safeguarding are met.

### Recommended next steps

Leaders should:

- extend access to research materials in prep school lessons to enable pupils to further explore their own individual academic interests.

## Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

12. Governors have range of professional expertise in safeguarding, health and safety, education and hence have an informed overview of the implementation of policies and procedures. They undertake their oversight through meetings, visits and by reviewing documentation. In addition, they receive systematic training from professional bodies which ensures that their awareness keeps up to date.
13. Governors ensure that school leaders fulfil their responsibilities effectively and consistently. Leaders have a wide range of relevant skills and knowledge. They have an acute awareness of the impact on all aspects of pupils' wellbeing in the decisions that they make.
14. Leaders ensure that the curriculum, pastoral care arrangements and opportunities for co-curricular involvement are coherent and consistent across the age ranges. An example of this is gathering of all aspects of safeguarding, behaviour management and personal, social and health education PSHE under the umbrella of 'We Thrive', the school's pastoral care initiative. This has enabled leaders to identify areas for review, such as the arrangements for listening to pupils' views.
15. The aims of the school are known to pupils, parents and staff. They are reflected in the school development plan and thread through schemes of work and individual lesson plans, and in staff interactions with pupils, with a discernible impact on pupils' wellbeing. For example, the aim of enabling pupils to explore their academic potential provides the rationale behind curriculum changes in the prep school: and the creation of a rich extra-curricular environment is indicated in the use of co-curricular activities to support all groups of pupils.
16. The school comprehensively self-evaluates every aspect of school life. The evaluation is rooted in a granular analysis of current approaches, for example to the curriculum or in teaching. Evaluation draws on an extensive use of data, surveys and discussion groups across the two sites. Immediate action is taken if necessary.
17. Each item of the development plan is tagged with an associated risk. Leaders and governors are mindful of the risk to pupils' welfare, and in particular of inaction. These risks are mitigated in the detail of individual approaches to issues. For example, pastoral care plans which require frequent and detailed checks on pupils' wellbeing.
18. The governors' compliance group regularly reviews the implementation of policies and procedures to ensure that they are implemented consistently. Protocols are understood by staff and pupils, for example in the areas of safeguarding or the management of behaviour. Governors carefully review the arrangements for pupils with additional needs, and leaders make appropriate reasonable adjustments in the curriculum, the provision of information and the physical site. The school meets the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.
19. Leaders have long-standing links with the variety of statutory agencies provided locally. The links are effective, and the wellbeing of individual pupils is promoted.
20. The school's website provides extensive information about school life. It includes all mandatory material. Parental and pupils' handbooks are detailed. Weekly newsletters give more general background about events. Parents value the information that they receive about pupils'

achievement. Parents and carers of children in the early years also receive additional daily updates on their children's activities.

21. The school's complaints procedure is in line with requirements. It encourages parents to share concerns with appropriate staff, including those about the provision in the early years. All concerns, including at the informal stage, are recorded centrally and reviewed by governors to identify any themes or patterns.
22. The school reports to the appropriate local authority any pupils who join or leave the school at non-standard times in the school year.

### **The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance**

- 23. All the relevant Standards are met.**

## Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

24. Leaders in the prep and senior school liaise effectively to ensure that pupils experience a curriculum that coherently progresses as they move through the school.
25. Leaders and staff in the early years have an extensive knowledge of the early stages of children's development and adapt activities to individual needs. These are integrated into a rich and varied curriculum for the youngest children. Staff consistently support children and adjust their approach and language to children's individual strengths and needs. Children are well prepared for their next year at every stage.
26. Leaders have introduced a new curriculum in the prep school in line with the school's aim to enable pupils to explore their own academic potential. In Years 1 to 3 the curriculum is planned around agreed topics, but pupils are encouraged to initiate and guide the direction of their learning. For example, centred on the topic of Robin Hood, pupils decided to look at forest environments and poverty. In Years 4 to 6, pupils develop enquiries starting from a philosophical question, such as 'Does anybody win a war?' Teachers skilfully manage the curriculum to allow pupils to cultivate their interests whilst ensuring that each of the mandatory areas of study is covered.
27. Leaders have introduced the 'prep way', which introduces prep-school pupils to curriculum experiences taught at the senior school, for example in science, swimming or modern foreign languages. In this way the curriculum extends pupils' skills, and hence considers their aptitudes and needs.
28. The senior school curriculum covers all the required areas of study. It enables pupils to experience an extensive range of subjects, including three modern foreign languages, Latin and classical civilisation. Pupils can develop their creative potential at GCSE and A level through painting, sculpture, ceramics or textiles. The sixth-form curriculum broadens further, with the addition of, for example, economics and philosophy. A lower sixth course in mathematical studies supports the continued development of pupils' numeracy.
29. Across the curriculum teachers use a wide range of resources effectively. Prep school pupils do not yet have the easy access to research materials and so cannot independently further develop their own enquiry during lessons.
30. The aim of the school to develop pupils' skills to advance their academic careers is threaded through the school's development plan to overarching aims, schemes of work and thence to individual lesson plans. For example, leaders have recognised that senior pupils needed to improve their recall of information, and this now is emphasised in lessons, with positive outcomes. Typically, lessons are segmented into a range of appropriate activities which provide a variety that successfully sustains pupils' engagement and motivation. Teachers manage class time and pupils' behaviour effectively.
31. Teachers have a secure knowledge of their subject and the way pupils learn. They explain concepts clearly and adjust levels of vocabulary to the individual needs of pupils, particularly those who speak English as an additional language. As a result, pupils quickly acquire new knowledge, increase their understanding and develop their skills.
32. Leaders and teachers effectively identify pupils who have SEND. Teachers are provided with information about possible effective strategies for each pupil. These are integrated into the planning



and teaching of lessons. Approaches are regularly evaluated and if necessary amended. Pupils who have SEND make progress that is at least in line with other pupils. Teachers make effective adjustments in their planning for pupils who have a physical disability.

33. There is a robust framework for evaluating the standard of pupils' work. Teachers provide appropriate and precise feedback. For example, in the prep school pupils can make improvements between each stage of their writing as a result of teachers' advice. Pupils are assessed frequently. The school liaises effectively with parents about the consequences of the results. Data is appropriately used to adapt teaching and provide extra support to pupils who need it. For example, teachers provide tasks that focus on relative weaknesses for pupils.
34. At GCSE and A level both boys' and girls' results are consistently above average. Teachers have taken steps to start raising boys' progress further to the high level achieved by girls at GCSE.
35. Leaders have introduced a rich and extensive co-curricular programme that provides opportunities for pupils to develop intellectual, creative, sporting and other physical skills. These include swimming, and survival and confidence skills in a recently developed woodland area.

### **The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to the quality of education, training and recreation**

- 36. All the relevant Standards are met.**

## Section 3: Pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing

37. Leaders have brought the pastoral curriculum under the banner of 'We Thrive', which centres on pupils' wellbeing and personal development. The initiative formally identifies links with the curriculum and other contributions to the development of pupils' self-esteem and knowledge. These include talks in assembly, tutor group discussions and whole school foci on, for example, mental health. Pupils appreciate the coherence of messages received, and the involvement of senior pupils in some of the activities. An example is when the sixth-form produced video to teach prep school pupils sign language.
38. Respect for people's differences is encouraged in PSHE education and the wider curriculum. For example, prep school pupils starting with the question 'are we ever free?' develop a mature understanding of human rights in the context of gender and religious or national background. The PSHE curriculum draws on the experiences of pupils in the school's equality, diversity and inclusion group to ensure that the content is relevant and up to date.
39. Pastoral leaders actively promote pupils' self-confidence through the co-curricular programme. Pupils are encouraged to select activities that will both interest and challenge them. Participation is tracked weekly, and the impact of the activity on vulnerable pupils is closely monitored. Pupils develop resilience and tenacity through a wide choice of pursuits, and many achieve success in the well-supported Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme or recognition in the Combined Cadet Force.
40. Leaders have implemented a wide-ranging programme of physical education. Specialist teachers in different sports enable pupils to achieve a high standard. Both boys and girls have opportunities to play a full range of sports. Competitive fixtures are played from Year 3. The variety of physical activity, including for example yoga, judo, strength and conditioning, ensures all pupils can develop skills and fitness.
41. Children in the early years are taught about the importance of healthy life choices, such as a balanced diet, being physical, sleeping, and oral health. Leaders ensure that health education for prep school pupils is reinforced, for example by discussing at lunch the choice of food. Older prep and senior school pupils talk openly about mental health and the benefits to it of taking part in co-curricular activities.
42. The relationships and sex education (RSE) curriculum provides age-appropriate learning and progression between the prep and senior schools. Pupils are consulted regularly about the content and timing of topics. Senior pupils value especially the time given for discussion around complex topics.
43. The written behaviour policy effectively promotes good behaviour. Pupils are consulted about the criteria and tariff for rewards and sanctions, and in particular how these should be adjusted for pupils who have SEND. Staff and pupils understand the procedures, and as result they are implemented consistently and fairly. Pupils are honest and open, readily admitting mistakes and accepting any consequences. Any behavioural incidents are almost all related to chatting in lessons. These are dealt with effectively by teachers. Incidents of more serious misbehaviour, such as those based on a lack of respect for different genders or racial background, are rare. These are dealt with effectively by leaders.

44. The school's anti-bullying strategy successfully minimises bullying. Staff are well trained to identify and deal with issues. Pupils have a secure understanding of what might constitute bullying, and of the need to report any concerns. When bullying does occur, staff provide effective support for the pupils involved. Pastoral leaders routinely direct pupils who are having, for example friendship or confidence issues, towards particular co-curricular activities that might provide fresh social opportunities or support, with many examples of successful outcomes.
45. Sixth-form pupils apply to become prefects and on appointment receive specific and relevant training. This includes talking through a variety of disciplinary and welfare scenarios. Consequently, they are well prepared for their roles.
46. Leaders are committed to providing high-quality facilities and resources. This is reflected in the decisions made by governors and leaders. These include the reordering of the learning areas for children in the early years to enable them to initiate their own learning, and the refurbishment of an off-site woodland area to develop pupils' outdoor skills. Premises and accommodation are well maintained. There are suitable medical rooms on both the senior and junior school sites. Well-qualified staff regularly check first aid equipment. Pupils receive first aid promptly, both in school and on external trips.
47. Through regular and robust checking of the sites and documentation, governors and leaders effectively promote the safety of pupils. Approaches to health and safety, including the risk of fire, are well understood by staff and pupils, and implemented effectively. Staff are trained to identify, assess and mitigate risk in both routine school activities and the extensive activities that take place outside school.
48. Pupils are effectively supervised at a level appropriate to pupils' age and possible risk. Access both to and from the sites is strictly controlled.
49. Staff accurately complete the admissions and attendance registers. They rigorously follow up any unexplained pupil absence from school. Leaders report to the local authority any pupils who either join or leave at non-standard times in the school year.

### **The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing**

**50. All the relevant Standards are met.**

## Section 4: Pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society

51. Leaders have effectively implemented a curriculum policy and practice that ensures that pupils have access to a broad range of human, social and economic education. Pupils access a range of subjects that support pupils' understanding about respect and tolerance for the differences between people. Pupils are convincing in their understanding of these areas and the application to their lives and experience.
52. The PSHE curriculum includes opportunities for prep and senior pupils to share aspects of their faith with others. Religious festivals are used to bring an increasing sophistication to pupils' understanding as they move through the school. The curriculum enables pupils to study a broad array of modern foreign languages, and others can be experienced in co-curricular clubs. Teachers use these opportunities, together with overseas trips, to develop pupils' understanding of different cultural attitudes.
53. Children in the early years are encouraged to interact socially. They learn to wait and take turns and interact considerately with others. Teachers skilfully draw out and extend vocabulary which helps children describe to each other their feelings and ideas.
54. Pupils have a clear understanding of right and wrong. For example, children in the Nursery and Reception years know to take turns and how to be kind to each other. Prep and senior school pupils seize opportunities to debate moral and political issues, whether in class or as part of the Model United Nations (MUN) programme. They have a secure knowledge of public policy and structures of governments across the world. For example, senior school pupils explain the role of the United Nations in seeking an end to current wars, and sixth-form pupils explore the influences on American politics. Pupils are given the knowledge and skills to develop informed viewpoints.
55. Economic education forms a key part of the PSHE programme. Year 6 pupils are assigned money to organise stalls at the school's summer fair, and hence they start to develop an awareness of profit and loss. Senior school pupils learn about the potential dangers from gambling, about fraud and then later about security of online financial transactions. In mathematical studies pupils accurately solve problems relating to tax, national insurance and the relationship to budgeting and affordability.
56. Careers education is up to date and accurate. It is threaded through the senior school curriculum and meets nationally respected benchmarks. Careers education is part of PSHE in every year. From Year 7 pupils use commercial software to start exploring possible post-school opportunities. Advice on curriculum choices in Years 7 to 9 are related to career planning. Year 10 pupils gain experience of employment in line with their skills, interests and aspirations, for example hospitals, farming and marketing. Local business leaders and former pupils are invited weekly to talk to any senior pupils about their own professions. There are co-curricular societies in medicine, engineering, the creative arts and law which further prepare pupils for post-sixth form courses. As a result, pupils feel well-prepared for applications. They achieve places on a range of university and degree apprentice courses.
57. As part of the 'We Thrive' initiative leaders have improved the channels through which pupils can be consulted. Pupils feel that they are listened to, and that action is taken. For example, lunch menus

have been changed, and co-curricular clubs such as early-morning cricket nets have been introduced.

58. Pastoral and academic leaders encourage pupils to support others. Senior school pupils support prep school pupils with reading or mathematics. Help in settling to a new school is given to new pupils by current ones. Sixth-form pupils with the same relevant experience are used as mentors for younger pupils. These pupils benefit from the additional support and guidance from their older peers.
59. The school's pre-medical club is well attended. Sixth-form members regularly deliver lectures to prep-school pupils on aspects of health education such as dental hygiene or looking after the heart.
60. Pupils contribute to their local communities through voluntary work at and fundraising for local communities. These includes work at charity shops, hospices, hospitals and homes for the elderly. Although pupils initiate this as part of the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme, many retain their commitment after completion.

### **The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society**

**61. All the relevant Standards are met.**

## Safeguarding

62. Leaders' approaches to policy, practice and implementation provide an effective approach to safeguarding pupils in their care. Leaders are alert to the contextual safeguarding risks to pupils both on-site and in the wider community. They take all reasonable steps to keep pupils safe.
63. Pupils say they feel safe. They receive regular teaching and guidance on how to protect themselves in school and the outside world, including online. There are adults they can go to if they are concerned at any time. Leaders find a range of additional ways to give pupils opportunities to raise concerns. For example, pupils in the prep school can book a 'time to talk'.
64. Staff have a secure awareness of the particular needs of children in Nursery and Reception classes. Protocols, including those related to digital devices, intimate care, and paediatric first aid, are scrupulously followed by adults.
65. Safeguarding leaders have an accurate and up-to-date knowledge of statutory guidance or advice and follow it rigorously. This includes procedures to address potential radicalisation of pupils. Issues involving pupils are considered in the context of their wellbeing.
66. Leaders work closely with relevant safeguarding partners, including external agencies such as children's services and other local statutory advisory organisations. This includes in handling any allegations against adults and referrals to the local authority designated officer. Procedures are followed effectively, and the school follows up actions promptly. Safeguarding records are kept securely. They are detailed and include the rationale behind leaders' decisions.
67. The training of staff is comprehensive and frequent. Staff feel well prepared to identify and address safeguarding issues. Staff record and report potential issues without delay and in detail. Leaders review and act quickly on these reports.
68. Leaders put in place effective procedures to support pupils involved in any safeguarding incident. Leaders give time for pastoral heads to evaluate the impact of the support regularly and thoroughly. They do this to see where they can make adjustments if necessary to the support they provide. Leaders liaise closely and at an early stage with parents, carers and other staff to identify particularly vulnerable pupils. In this way they effectively identify and manage any risks to pupils' welfare.
69. Governors are diligent in ensuring that leaders react systematically to any emerging needs in the school. They have invested in additional staffing to support pupils' wellbeing and digital safety. Arrangements for the monitoring and filtering of online technology are effective.
70. All appropriate pre-employment and recruitment checks are made on adults before they come into contact with pupils. The record of these checks is well maintained and accurate.

### The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

**71. All the relevant Standards are met.**

## School details

<b>School</b>	Newcastle-under-Lyme School
<b>Department for Education number</b>	860/6015
<b>Registered charity number</b>	1124463
<b>Address</b>	Newcastle-under-Lyme School Mount Pleasant Newcastle-under-Lyme Staffordshire ST5 1DB
<b>Phone number</b>	01782 631197
<b>Email address</b>	seniorreception@nuls.org.uk
<b>Website</b>	www.nuls.org.uk
<b>Proprietor</b>	Newcastle-under-Lyme School
<b>Chair</b>	Mr David Wallbank
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Michael Getty
<b>Age range</b>	2 to 19
<b>Number of pupils</b>	889
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	3 to 5 March 2020

## Information about the school

72. Newcastle-under-Lyme school is an independent co-educational day school. It is a registered charity, overseen by a governing body.
73. The school is divided into the senior school for pupils aged 11 to 18 years, which includes a sixth form, and the junior school for pupils aged 4 to 11 years, which includes the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) for children aged 2 to 4 years.
74. The school has identified 56 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). No pupil in the school has an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
75. English is an additional language for 37 pupils.
76. The school states its aims to provide an excellent education to children in the region, embracing the community's diversity and facilitating access to children from a wide range of economic backgrounds.



## Inspection details

### Inspection dates

16 to 18 April 2024

77. A team of seven inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

78. Inspection activities included:

- observation of lessons, some in conjunction with school leaders
- observation of registration periods and assemblies
- observation of a sample of extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection
- discussions with the chair of governors
- discussions with the head, school leaders, managers and other members of staff
- discussions with pupils
- visits to the learning support area and facilities for physical education
- scrutiny of samples of pupils' work
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

79. The inspection team considered the views of pupils, members of staff and parents who responded to ISI's pre-inspection surveys.

**How are association independent schools in England inspected?**

- The Department for Education is the regulator for independent schools in England.
- ISI is approved by the Secretary of State for Education to inspect independent schools in England, which are members of associations in membership of the Independent Schools Council.
- ISI inspections report to the Department for Education on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards, the EYFS statutory framework requirements, the National Minimum Standards for boarding schools and any other relevant standards are met.
- For more information, please visit **[www.isi.net](http://www.isi.net)**.

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For more information, please visit [isi.net](http://isi.net)