

Parent Power

Northeast

Who dares to be wise at Durham Johnston Comprehensive School (it's the school motto), wins, as once again this Parent Power favourite takes the crown, bagging the **Northeast Secondary School of the Year** award for the second year running.

The comprehensive school has had success in the national rankings too, climbing 15 places from 192 to 177=, while the regional runner-up, Queen Elizabeth High School in Hexham, Northumberland, jumps 20 places to break into the national top 250 state schools, placing at 239. This year two thirds of its A-level grades were A*-B (or equivalent).

However, schools across the northeast have faced numerous challenges since the pandemic and many have slipped this year in comparison to other regions.

"But it's not just results that are down. When you start to look at attendance, it's worse in the northeast than in many other regions," says the head teacher at Durham Johnston, Andrew O'Sullivan.

"We're 13 years into a period of austerity – that initial lack of funding had a very negative impact in this part of the country. Poverty is the reason behind poor attendance. This is true across the country, but it is even more pronounced in the northeast because of long-term economic decline.

"For some families, it's easier for their children to be at home. There are issues around transport, around uniform. Families aren't equipped to get children out and to school every day –

that structure has declined for those families." He says that the school's success is all down to building strong relationships. "The only way children achieve good results is when it works between themselves, their teachers and their families. Relationships are the biggest thing in any successful school, 100 per cent."

To help relationships to flourish, not flounder, the school holds two parental surveys every academic year to find out what parents are expecting. One suggestion taken up by leaders has been to publish detailed curriculum plans on the website so parents know exactly what their child is studying each term.

The coeducational Royal Grammar School (RGS) in Newcastle has taken first place in the table for academic excellence and is the **Northeast Independent School of the Year** – helping the city to bag a coveted hat-trick of places in the region's top five independent schools list. The head, Geoffrey Standford, is

proud that RGS is "unapologetically academic, delivering consistently outstanding exam results". He calls his school "a catalyst for raising ambition and attainment across this wonderful region".

The school's dedication to providing means-tested bursaries – with one in 16 children at RGS receiving a free education – "makes 'levelling up' a reality rather than a soundbite".

It is now ranked just outside the top 50 nationally, up by 23 places year on year, and shines as one of the very brightest of northern stars; 85.2 per cent of GCSE grades were at 7-9 this year, with 88.8 per cent of A-levels graded at A*-B across the 29 subjects on offer, which range from Latin and Greek to film studies.

Always progressive since their foundation in 1705, Dame Allan's Girls' and Boys' Schools, ranked respectively third and fourth in the northeast, are now engaged in developing ways for AI to be incorporated into teaching and learning.



TOP 5

SECONDARY SCHOOLS

1 Durham Johnston Comprehensive School (177=)

Regional rank	National rank
2 Queen Elizabeth High School, Hexham	239
3 St Mary's Catholic School, Newcastle upon Tyne	249
4 Ponteland High School	281
5 Gosforth Academy	290

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

1 Royal Grammar School, Newcastle upon Tyne (51)

Regional rank	National rank
2 Yarm School	109
3 Dame Allan's Girls' School, Newcastle upon Tyne	156
4 Dame Allan's Boys' School, Newcastle upon Tyne	174
5 Durham High School	188

FROM PLANTING A SEED



THERE'S MORE TO LIFE AT RGS



DISCOVER MORE

www.rgs.newcastle.sch.uk
Royal Grammar School Newcastle
Fee assistance available



TO TAKING THE LEAD

"With children, it's about enabling them to become AI prompt engineers, embedding the idea that it's still your work, your effort, but you're using the tools at your disposal – like using an electric screwdriver instead of a manual one," Will Scott, the principal, says.

Dame Allan's is unique among regional independents in following the "diamond structure" – splitting boys and girls from the ages of 11 to 16 into single-sex classes.

"Girls don't fear being a scientist or good at maths, boys don't fear engaging with their feelings," Scott says. "Then at A-level they come together, and things become much more integrated."

There's a big focus on the arts; the £8 million Jubilee Building, which opened in February, houses an art gallery to display student work, and pupils have recently moved on to the Rambert School of Ballet and Contemporary Dance and to music conservatoires.

However, this aspirational Geordie hegemony has a Parent Power challenger. Yarm School, near Stockton-on-Tees, might be something of an outlier, but it has charged up 20 places in the national rankings this year, from 129 to 109.

Pupils are involved in a number of local activities, including Memento, a choir and music group that performs for people with dementia, and the school is known for its spectacular performances and shows, held in its theatre.

Huw Williams, the headmaster, who has his three children enrolled at the school, praises its location. "We have the huge benefit of being in the northeast," he says. "Our outdoor education programme is also terrific: caving, canoeing, Scottish mountaineering trips. For some of our pupils it is a real focus."

Bright sparks in the science laboratory at Royal Grammar School in Newcastle upon Tyne

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