

School inspection report

5 to 7 November 2024

Royal Grammar School

Eskdale Terrace

Jesmond

Newcastle upon Tyne

NE2 4DX

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 and leaders ensure that the values of the school are known and understood by staff and pupils. The values are clearly articulated and lived out by pupils who value the respect, sense of belonging and inclusion they experience. The curriculum is built around these values and expressed in the school's many partnership activities within the community.
2. Leaders' commitment to promote a highly developed awareness of and sensitivity towards diversity in the pupils is a significant strength of the school. Pupils speak with confidence about cultural and economic diversity, neurodiversity, and protected characteristics. Their participation in voluntary and partnership opportunities within the community, and their behaviour, reflect this positive approach to inclusion.
3. Leaders have designed a rich curriculum and co-curricular programme so pupils gain new knowledge, deepen understanding and develop new skills. Pupils enjoy their learning and are keen to show what they know and can do. Teachers adapt learning activities so that all pupils can access the learning and achieve well.
4. Pupils make good progress, with the majority of pupils achieving better than their expected performance. Many pupils, either at GCSE or at A level, attain the top grades possible. In the junior school, pupils achieve significantly above national averages in English and mathematics.
5. Pupils behave well. They show each other respect and make good progress in lessons because of their application to tasks set by their teachers and their desire to succeed.
6. Pupils are appropriately guided and prepared for the next stages in their lives. This is due to the high-quality careers provision. However, some senior pupils do not have a secure grasp of basic financial management which results in them lacking confidence when dealing with issues about their own economic futures. This is an area to develop further.
7. Leaders and governors have effective oversight of safeguarding practice. They ensure that safeguarding policies and practices are in line with statutory expectations. Pupils feel safe.

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:

- Develop the economic education of senior pupils to prepare them more fully for the next stages in their lives.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

8. Governors appropriately challenge and support leaders through the effective scrutiny of policies and their oversight of procedures. Governors are known by staff and are a visible presence through their joint learning walks with senior staff and frequent visits. They work closely with leaders to identify and mitigate risks, review policies and procedures and evaluate the performance of the school in order to ensure that the Standards are met.
9. Leaders articulate the school's vision, purpose and ethos. They work closely with governors to identify strengths and areas for further development. The school strategy is translated into action plans which have clear and beneficial impacts for pupils.
10. Leaders actively promote a significant range of projects with other schools and within the community. Pupils benefit from the many leadership opportunities these projects provide along with the development of their self-knowledge, self-esteem and self-confidence.
11. Leaders have the skills, knowledge and understanding to promote pupils' wellbeing which is central to the school's ethos and is at the heart of school culture. Leaders know their pupils very well and ensure that the provision meets their individual needs well overall. Pupils have confidence in the school's leaders.
12. Leaders have created a rich curriculum and a broad co-curricular programme through which pupils develop secure knowledge, understanding and skills across a comprehensive range of subjects. This fosters positive attitudes to learning and respectful behaviour.
13. Leaders have worked with teachers in the senior school to agree the principles of effective teaching. Leaders check the quality of teaching and learning against these expectations so pupils make good progress.
14. Leaders ensure the needs of individual pupils, especially those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), are detailed and easily available to teachers to use when adapting learning in class. Appropriate information is provided to the local authority related to pupils' provision where they have an education, health and care (EHC) plan. This includes information related to pupils' learning development, and that related to funding.
15. Parents are provided with extensive and up-to-date information on the website which contains relevant policies and information. Leaders provide parents with an annual written report on their child's progress.
16. There is a suitable complaints policy which is implemented effectively. The small number of complaints received are handled in a timely fashion. Leaders keep appropriate records and governors maintain oversight of the school's processes for responding to any complaints that arise, including any actions taken and lessons learned.
17. Governors and leaders have effective oversight of health and safety. Potential risks are identified and appropriate measures are put in place to mitigate risk in areas such as fire, health and safety and educational visits.

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

18. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

19. Leaders ensure that there is a broad and balanced curriculum, which covers all the requirements of linguistic, mathematical, scientific, technological, aesthetic and creative subjects, in both the junior and senior schools. In the junior school, leaders actively promote reading for pleasure and as a consequence standards of reading are high. Teachers in the junior school have high expectations; pupils rise to the challenges set and show sophisticated levels of understanding in English.
20. Well-planned and well-resourced lessons in the creative subjects, such as art, music and drama, motivate and challenge pupils to make rapid progress. In the senior school at GCSE, pupils can choose courses such as Latin and Greek alongside several technical, creative and performance-based options. Leaders take into account the diverse interests and aptitudes of pupils and encourage a sense of belonging.
21. Teachers use a range of effective teaching methods to help pupils acquire new knowledge, increase their understanding, and make good progress. Pupils achieve very well in examination results at both GCSE and A level which are well above national norms.
22. Pupils practise and develop their oracy skills within the classroom, in assemblies and extensively in societies where they discuss and debate topical issues. Pupils develop well-formulated opinions which they express well.
23. Technology is used effectively to support learning. Pupils use their devices to follow lessons directly from interactive boards. The devices display clear schemes of work, objectives, and a variety of supporting resources across key stages which pupils use well to help reinforce their learning.
24. Leaders check pupil's work and their academic performance. They use the information gathered to provide additional support and challenge to pupils. Pupils are provided with feedback which is in line with the policy. Pupils in the junior school correct any errors they may have made. All pupils readily engage with their teachers to discuss how to improve their work.
25. Pupils have highly positive attitudes to their learning. They are encouraged to take risks and try new ideas. Pupils' learning and self-awareness is enhanced through opportunities for them to evaluate each other's work and present their ideas to the class. Pupils are enthusiastic, self-motivated learners who particularly enjoy the freedom, creativity and skills that they develop in practical subjects. There are warm relationships between pupils and teachers which helps to foster a love of learning.
26. The school is diverse. Pupils are appreciated, valued and supported by their teachers, who speak with pride about individual pupils' achievements and progress.
27. Leaders provide an extensive co-curricular programme which enables pupils to acquire new knowledge and develop additional skills. Sport is particularly well established. Equally there is a range of activities including some suggested by pupils, such as board games and a knitting club. Many of these activities are led by pupils. Pupils have opportunities to develop physically, to engage in team pursuits, to be competitive, to create, perform and invent. Pupils test their business and adventuring skills and also have the opportunity to support charitable works.

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

28. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

29. Pupils' physical, mental and emotional health is prioritised well. Pupils know the importance of respecting others. Senior pupils have access to counsellors and a mental health room. In the junior school, the cozy corner provides the youngest pupils a space to relax or reflect. Pupils value the positive impact their physical environment has on their wellbeing. The regular visits from the therapy dog offer pupils an opportunity to express their feelings and emotions.
30. There is an effective relationships and sex education programme provided. For older pupils they are given the opportunity to deepen their understanding, and appreciate the value of, healthy relationships. This builds self-knowledge, self-esteem and self-confidence.
31. Pupils' spiritual knowledge is developed through assemblies, as well as in the religious education and philosophy curriculum. The co-curricular programme, including clubs to support those who adhere to a particular faith, additionally offers pupils a variety of performing and creative arts subjects and the opportunity to celebrate and reflect on the non-material aspects of life. Pupils are able to take advantage of the 'retreat' and quiet rooms for prayer.
32. Leaders ensure that pupils develop healthy habits through an extensive programme of sporting activities where they participate in team and individual sports, swimming and yoga.
33. Leaders set high expectations for pupil behaviour, and a clearly understood and consistently applied rewards and sanctions policy encourages pupils to self-regulate and conduct themselves appropriately. Pupils behave in a mature and considerate fashion.
34. Leaders prevent and minimise the impact of bullying. Pupils know how to recognise bullying behaviour and how to report it. A small number of pupils comment on some unkind behaviour. Leaders take concerns seriously and deal with any issues that arise or are reported. As a result, leaders have surveyed parents and pupils to inform an action plan to increase awareness of anti-bullying strategies. Reported instances of bullying are dealt with effectively. Leaders maintain appropriate records of bullying incidents and school records show extensive follow up for both the perpetrator and victim. The implementation of the new mobile phone policy has led to a decrease in cyber bullying incidents.
35. Pupils are appropriately supervised by sufficient staff on duty. The school premises and accommodation are maintained to an appropriate standard through regular checks and servicing of equipment. Fire safety policies, and measures such as regular fire drills are appropriately implemented and regularly monitored. Suitable arrangements are in place to care for pupils who become unwell and first aid is properly administered, when required, by staff who have regular and up-to-date training.
36. Admission and attendance registers are appropriately maintained. Leaders carefully monitor attendance to look for trends or patterns, gaining parental support when required. Leaders fulfil their responsibilities to the local authority by reporting when pupils join or leave the school at non-standard times.

37. The voice of pupils is effectively represented and heard. The well-trained prefect team meets with school leaders regularly to review a wide range of topics covered by their duties in the curriculum, in pastoral support and in the co-curricular programme. Pupils act as peer mentors to younger pupils in the classroom and as anti-bullying ambassadors to help minimise and deal with any instances of bullying that might occur.

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

38. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

39. Leaders ensure that the school curriculum provides a wealth of opportunities for pupils to experience human, social and economic education. In keeping with the aims of the school, the curriculum helps to inspire and nurture pupils to create and shape their own future and that of wider society.
40. Pupils are provided with a moral education through a carefully designed programme of lessons, visiting speakers and other special events. Pupils learn skills of tolerance and inclusion. Pupils embrace the strategies they are shown to pause and reflect before reacting to situations. Pupils show respect to one another and to adults.
41. Pupils show mutual respect for those of other cultures and ethnicities. They have a deep understanding of the importance of equality and diversity. Pupils enjoy celebrating their own and other cultures in whole school days set aside for this purpose. There is a pupil-led diversity group which raises awareness and develops understanding of protected characteristics. Pupils of all ages show respect for the differences between people, in line with the Equality Act 2010.
42. Pupils learn to understand issues such as gender and sexuality through the personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) programme.
43. In the senior school, pupils benefit from a tutor system which involves pupils in different year groups, promotes social wellbeing and benefits both younger and older pupils. Older pupils are good role models and the structure and continuity provided by the tutor system is a contributory factor to building an inclusive culture.
44. Pupils express and share opinions about school improvement through being actively involved in the school council. Pupils understand democracy through elections to the school council.
45. There is a range of opportunities where pupils can be closely involved in the local community. For example, pupils volunteer in primary schools, engage in supporting a local foodbank, and work in a school for pupils who have SEND. As a result, pupils display consideration for others. Sixth form pupils develop essential life skills such as communication, resilience, and adaptability through these opportunities for voluntary work.
46. The school's careers guidance programme is comprehensive, well structured, and highly valued by pupils. Beginning in Year 7, this programme offers sustained and progressive exposure to various career pathways and industries, building towards practical career preparation in the sixth form. Pupils participate in a broad range of career-related activities, including projects, work experience, interview practice, and leadership training. Co-curricular activities such as *MedSoc* and *LawSoc* offer talks with professionals for pupils interested in these careers.
47. Economic education is generally well developed. Some pupils in the senior school have opportunities to develop their entrepreneurial skills, however, senior pupils are not as confident with basic financial management and the impact this has on issues in their own economic future.

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

48. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

49. Leaders with designated safeguarding responsibilities are suitably trained for their role and have sufficient time to carry out their safeguarding duties. Leaders keep detailed records and use these effectively to identify patterns of behaviour and analyse trends so that appropriate and timely actions are taken. Leaders respond effectively whenever safeguarding concerns are raised so that pupils' care and safety is prioritised. Leaders maintain effective partnerships with external agencies, including the local authority and have appropriate arrangements in place to respond to any allegations or concerns about staff.
50. Leaders encourage pupils to share any concerns that they might have. Pupils know who to turn to in school and are comfortable talking to adults if something is worrying them. Pupils feel safe and happy at school. They understand how to stay safe online. Leaders monitor online activity effectively and ensure that filtering arrangements are appropriate.
51. Staff are well trained to address safeguarding concerns and receive regular updates. Staff understand that "it could happen here", are trained to understand the risks from extremism and radicalisation and know how to identify warning signs in pupils' behaviour. There is an effective whistleblowing policy in place.
52. There is a robust recruitment process in place. All required pre-employment safeguarding checks on staff, volunteers and governors are completed before employment begins. The school's single central record of appointments is accurately maintained and checked by governors. Well-maintained staff files contain the required information. Leaders and governors are trained in safer recruitment and regularly review safeguarding processes and policies, which are amended to reflect contextual risk or changes to statutory guidance.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

School details

School	Royal Grammar School
Department for Education number	391/6037
Registered charity number	1114424
Address	Eskdale Terrace Jesmond Newcastle upon Tyne NE2 4DX
Phone number	0191 281 5711
Email address	communications@rgs.newcastle.sch.uk
Website	www.rgs.newcastle.sch.uk
Proprietor	Board of governors
Chair	Alan Fletcher
Headteacher	Geoffrey Stanford
Age range	7 to 18
Number of pupils	1332
Date of previous inspection	5 to 8 October 2021

Information about the school

54. The Royal Grammar School, Newcastle is an academically selective co-educational day school for pupils aged 7 to 18 years. The junior and senior schools share the same site and are overseen by a board of governors who are also trustees of the registered charity.
55. The school has identified 153 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). A few pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan. The school has not identified any pupils as having English as an additional language.
56. The school states its aims are to inspire and equip pupils to make a positive contribution to society, to promote excellence and raise aspiration and attainment across the North East. It seeks to inculcate a love for learning, a belief in each other, a sense of belonging and an ambition to succeed amongst its pupils.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

5 to 7 November 2024

57. A team of 7 inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

58. 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 and other 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.

59. 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**.

Independent Schools Inspectorate

CAP House, 9-12 Long Lane, London, EC1A 9HA

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