ISI Independent Schools Inspectorate

School inspection report

9 to 11 September 2025

Argyle House school

19-20 Thornhill Park

Sunderland

Tyne and Wear

SR2 7LA

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. The governors work closely with senior leaders and staff to provide oversight of the school's educational provision. School policies are reviewed and revised in a timely manner. Leaders demonstrate thorough knowledge, skills and understanding. This means that they fulfil their responsibilities effectively. Consequently, the Standards are met consistently well.

2. Staff know the pupils well, so they respond to their individual needs routinely. Pupils become confident and develop self-esteem.

3. Leaders provide parents with useful and detailed information through the school's website. At the beginning of the inspection, two previous inspection reports were not available on the website. This was rectified during the inspection.

4. Teachers plan lessons carefully and pupils approach their learning responsibly. Pupils receive focused and helpful guidance and feedback about their work. Subject leaders use and respond to assessment information effectively. As a result, pupils know what they need to do to continue to improve. Pupils make good progress in their work.

5. Leaders in the early years provide an interesting and stimulating curriculum. Children are encouraged to learn, play and form positive relationships. They develop respect, kindness and confidence through their daily interactions and activities. The curriculum ensures that they are prepared well for Year 1.

6. Pupils learn the values of individual religious choice, tolerance and inclusion effectively. Children in the early years and pupils in the prep school are taught a suitable religious education (RE) curriculum. Senior pupils are respectful of the world's religions. However, they are provided with limited teaching about spirituality, faith and religion. This means that they lack a broad knowledge and understanding about the world's major religions.

7. Leaders provide a thorough and well-planned personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) curriculum which includes an appropriate relationships and sex education (RSE) component. PSHE lessons help pupils to develop resilience and responsibility and to form respectful and inclusive friendships.

8. Leaders provide careers guidance for pupils in the senior school, mainly through the PSHE curriculum. Overall, the careers education programme is appropriate. However, the careers provision provided to pupils in Years 7 and 8 is not as comprehensive or relevant to their individual aspirations as it is for the older pupils in the school.

9. Leaders offer a range of opportunities for pupils to provide service and support to others, both in school and the wider community. Pupils develop leadership skills and learn to be kind, supportive and helpful.

10. Leaders promote a vigilant and thorough safeguarding culture throughout the school. Staff are trained well and demonstrate a confident and competent understanding of the school's safeguarding procedures. Leaders maintain a robust approach to safer recruitment.

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:

- ensure that all required previous inspection reports are made available to parents on the school's website
- strengthen the careers guidance for pupils in Years 7 and 8 so that they are prepared effectively to make informed choices about future career opportunities
- enhance religious education teaching in the senior school so that pupils widen their knowledge and understanding of world religions.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

11. The governors provide effective oversight of school policies and the work of leaders and staff. They survey parents, pupils and staff annually. Governors visit the school frequently to conduct lesson walks, meet with staff and hold discussions with pupils. This means that they know and understand the school well. Members of the governing body meet with senior leaders regularly to provide scrutiny, challenge and support. As a result, they assure themselves that leaders have the appropriate knowledge and skills to fulfil their responsibilities carefully and effectively. The school meets the Standards consistently.

12. In line with the school's aims, leaders promote a range of academic qualities and personal values. Pupils aspire to these values and so that they make effective personal and academic progress. For example, leaders support pupils to learn strategies to build independence and resilience when faced with challenging situations. Staff know the pupils well and are quick to offer consistent and effective support. As a result, pupils develop self-esteem and confidence during their time at the school.

13. Leaders provide parents with a range of useful and detailed information, mainly through the school's website. At the start of the inspection, two previous inspection reports were not available on the school's website. This was rectified during the inspection. Parents receive appropriate written reports about their child's ongoing progress and attainment. Leaders consult appropriately with the local authority about the financial arrangements for pupils who have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan).

14. Leaders consult effectively with staff about the school's provision. Teachers in the early years, for example, identified a need to broaden their understanding of how to most effectively support children with a range of individual needs. They attended specific training to develop this aspect of their work. Teachers consulted about the relevance and effectiveness of their marking and feedback. As a result, they revised the school's approach so that pupils are better informed about what they do well, and how they can make further progress. The school's development plan includes contributions from staff consultations. Improvements are introduced consistently, positively and are well focused on the quality of education offered.

15. In the early years, experienced leaders promote and support children's wellbeing consistently well. They provide a stimulating and thoughtfully planned curriculum which is tailored to children's individual needs. Leaders develop positive partnerships with parents through regular meetings, learning journals and parents' observation booklets. The transition from Reception to Year 1 is managed effectively. As a result, children in the early years are prepared well for their next steps.

16. Leaders provide parents with an appropriate complaints policy which includes clear timescales and a suitable three-stage complaints process. Leaders and staff respond in a timely manner to any informal complaints. Suitable records are maintained of formal complaints, including of any actions taken.

17. Leaders consult with external agencies so that the expertise they provide informs school policies and procedures. Staff attend training hubs and visit other schools in the Forfar group to share ideas and effective teaching practice.

18. Leaders manage risk effectively and systematically. They provide staff with specific training so that risk assessments are carefully considered and consistent. Governors check the management of risk

regularly to assure themselves that arrangements are suitable. Appropriate risk assessments are implemented for on-site facilities and for a range of excursions which take place off site. Leaders provide thorough oversight of risk assessments, including reviews after trips and excursions have taken place. This means that risk assessments continue to be suitable.

19. The school fulfils its responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 effectively. Leaders maintain an appropriate accessibility plan which promotes an accessible education for all pupils. Leaders, for instance, make reasonable adjustments such as revising the timetable and adapting classrooms. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are provided with effective support through careful and individually tailored welfare and academic support plans.

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

20. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

21. The school provides an appropriate curriculum which includes a range of subjects and activities. Leaders provide effective guidance and oversight of pupils' learning through a schedule of regular staff meetings, learning walks and lesson observations. This means that the delivery of the curriculum continues to be suitable for pupils' ages and aptitudes. The curriculum effectively supports the values of tolerance, respect and inclusion. In drama, for example, pupils explore relationships and moral questions relating to personal freedom and choice. Pupils in history learn about the League of Nations and their work to support democracy and peace. The curriculum helps pupils to develop and extend their knowledge and understanding so that they are prepared effectively for the next stage of their education.

22. Teachers demonstrate secure subject knowledge which they use to plan and deliver interesting lessons. They use resources well so that pupils' learning is supported effectively. In art, for example, younger pupils use resources such as glitter and sequins when they plan, design and make historical royal costumes. Teachers structure lessons carefully so that pupils consolidate knowledge and develop understanding. In mathematics, for instance, pupils revise different types of numbers and extend their knowledge about factors and prime numbers. Teachers ask probing questions which require pupils to think carefully so that their understanding develops. In business lessons, pupils are encouraged to discuss unintended consequences when they devise marketing strategies for a new product. As a result of effective teaching methods, pupils make good progress in their work.

23. Pupils adopt responsible attitudes towards their learning so that they develop skills and widen their knowledge. They listen to others respectfully and collaborate well. In PSHE, for example, pupils work considerately in groups to discuss appropriate rules and guidelines for the creation of a new class charter. In English, they learn about and discuss the difference between implicit and explicit information. Pupils in mathematics work through a range of questions independently and quietly. They adopt different methods to solve problems on topics such as angles and money. Pupils respond well to instructions and guidance when they build models of the lung, chest cavity and diaphragm in science.

24. A suitable assessment framework provides teachers with useful information about pupils' progress. Subject leaders make effective use of assessment outcomes so that pupils continue to be supported well. Following mock GCSE examinations, for instance, teachers provide subject clinics so that pupils in Year 11 consolidate their understanding and knowledge. In the early years, teachers assess children's progress and introduce new ambitious words for those children who are ready to extend their vocabulary and understanding of sentences. Parents are provided with a suitable schedule of consultations and written reports relating to the progress their child is making. Pupils receive careful and individual guidance and feedback on their work so that they understand how well they are doing and how to make further progress.

25. Leaders in the early years provide effective opportunities for children to develop their language and communication skills. Children use scientific vocabulary when they describe how a stethoscope works. Leaders plan practical mathematical activities such as matching odd socks so that children practise counting and learn about odd numbers. Teachers ask thoughtful questions and allow time for children to consider their responses when they think of rhyming words and adjectives to describe objects in the classroom. Children in the early years are supported well so that they develop a confident understanding of language.

26. Information about the needs of pupils who have SEND is disseminated carefully to all teaching staff so that support is offered consistently and effectively. Pupils who have SEND are assessed regularly. Carefully written provision maps provide recommendations and strategies for teachers to use in classrooms. Teachers adapt resources and teaching methods so that pupils who have SEND make good progress from their starting points.

27. Pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) receive the help they need. Teachers, for example, provide word lists and writing frames when required. Pupils who have EAL are supported effectively to develop their use of the English language.

28. Leaders provide an appropriate programme of extra-curricular clubs and activities so that pupils can discover new interests and develop skills. In comic club, for example, pupils have opportunities to draw, design, write and read comics featuring their favourite superheroes. Pupils attend chess club and develop strategic thinking and decision-making. Junior and senior choir clubs help pupils to practise performance skills which develops their self-confidence and esteem.

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

29. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

30. The school actively promotes the emotional wellbeing of pupils at the school. Staff respond to pupils' pastoral and academic needs carefully. Assemblies, the PSHE programme and form tutor guidance help pupils to develop a secure understanding of how to treat others with kindness, tolerance and respect. The school community is inclusive and supportive. This means that pupils approach their education with enjoyment and confidence.

31. Younger pupils begin to develop a sense of spirituality through assemblies, PSHE lessons and the RE curriculum. Pupils study all the major religions throughout their time in the prep school. However, pupils in the senior school are provided with more limited opportunities to develop a sense of spirituality and to learn about faith and world religions. Senior pupils appropriately respect cultural diversity and freedom of choice, but they are not provided with a broad knowledge or understanding of the world's major religions.

32. Leaders ensure that a well-planned PSHE programme is taught. Pupils learn how to manage their emotional responses and explore the benefits of a balanced and healthy lifestyle. Younger pupils are taught, for example, the importance of regular sleep, physical exercise and eating healthily. Older pupils learn about the dangers of drugs and alcohol misuse. Leaders consult pupils and adapt the PSHE programme to include additional teaching on topics such as body image and self-esteem.

33. The school supports pupils' understanding of how to develop and maintain healthy relationships through an effective RSE curriculum. Pupils learn about the importance of consent and treating others with kindness and respect. They consider scenarios and explore how to respond to different situations in an appropriate manner. Parents are consulted in advance about any sensitive topics due to be taught.

34. Teachers provide a broad programme of physical education (PE) which supports pupils' physical and mental health. Pupils participate in a range of sports such as football, hockey and cricket. Staff teach pupils specific skills in training sessions such as dribbling and shooting techniques in football. In basketball, pupils practise movement and passing drills which they use effectively in match situations. Pupils develop sportsmanship and learn to approach competitive sport in a respectful and supportive manner.

35. Leaders promote positive behaviour so that pupils typically behave well at the school. In the early years, children fill a bucket with pompoms awarded for responsible and industrious actions which, when filled, results in a class treat. Older pupils receive house points and headteacher's commendations. Positive behaviour is reinforced so that pupils learn within a supportive and orderly environment. When misbehaviour occurs, leaders maintain thorough records which they analyse closely for any emerging patterns or trends.

36. Bullying incidents at the school are rare. The school's effective anti-bullying strategy is delivered through assemblies, the PSHE programme and an annual anti-bullying week. Pupils explore bullying scenarios in drama and PSHE lessons so that they know how to identify and respond to any unkind behaviour. If bullying occurs, leaders take suitable actions quickly and maintain clear and detailed records.

37. Teachers in the early years provide a broad range of opportunities to support children's development. In PE lessons, children develop co-ordination and balance when they participate in stretching and reaching activities. They use mirrors to observe themselves and sketch and draw self-portraits. In music, children play instruments and learn to sing. They design and construct ambitious towers out of building bricks. Children enjoy the range of activities and develop self-esteem and confidence.

38. Leaders promote a systematic approach to health and safety throughout the school. Several staff are trained as fire wardens. Fire and lockdown procedures are tested and rehearsed regularly. Any health and safety concerns are identified and reported quickly. Leaders conduct weekly visual checks of the premises and accommodation. Clear records are maintained of any actions taken. These measures mean that the school's premises, accommodation and facilities remain suitable for pupils.

39. Leaders make appropriate arrangements so that pupils are supervised vigilantly throughout the school day. Staff provide careful supervision for pupils when they arrive at and depart from school. During breaktimes, staff are alert and visible so that pupils play and relax in an orderly and suitable manner. An appropriate number of staff supervise children in the early years.

40. The school provides effective and well-managed first aid and medical facilities. Several staff hold appropriate first aid certificates, including paediatric first aid qualifications for those who work in the early years.

41. Leaders maintain appropriate admission and attendance registers in accordance with the latest statutory guidance. Senior staff analyse attendance data carefully and provide effective support, if required, to improve pupils' attendance. The school notifies the local authority when pupils join or leave the school at non-standard transition points.

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

42. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

43. The school supports pupils' understanding of tolerance, respect and inclusion effectively. Pupils explore the dangers caused by prejudiced and discriminatory attitudes through the curriculum. In PSHE lessons, for instance, pupils discuss scenarios relating to people who have a disability and those who choose to follow different faiths and religions. In history, pupils study the suffragettes and learn about equality and the developing role of women in society. Pupils learn about equality and respecting people's rights to make individual choices. As a result, they are prepared well for life in British society.

44. Pupils are taught about finance and money effectively. In the early years, children learn to buy and sell items using plastic coins. Pupils in the prep school demonstrate entrepreneurism when they use a starting budget and purchase materials to make products to sell for charitable profit. In business studies, older pupils explore marketing strategies and discuss product range and how to increase sales and profitability.

45. Leaders provide pupils in the senior school with impartial careers guidance so that they are informed and prepared about the world of work and future opportunities. All pupils in the senior school learn about careers through the PSHE curriculum. An external careers consultant visits the school to advise pupils and, for pupils in Year 11, this advice is provided individually. Pupils in Year 9 receive thorough and effective advice from their teachers relating to their GCSE subject option choices. Pupils in Year 11 benefit from work experience opportunities planned during Year 10 and visit local sixth-form centres and businesses. However, the careers programme for pupils in Years 7 and 8 is underdeveloped. This means that their individual future aspirations are not supported as effectively as they could be.

46. Pupils learn about democracy, politics and the rule of law effectively. Pupils discuss why rules and laws are an important part of peaceful and democratic societies. They participate in debates and learn to respect the viewpoints of others. Assemblies and PSHE lessons provide pupils with impartial information about British and international politics. As a result of these measures, pupils learn to be morally responsible and tolerant towards others.

47. Pupils are provided with a range of opportunities to provide help and service to others within the school community. Senior pupils are elected as house and sports captains. They develop leadership skills by assisting staff with events such as sports days and promoting a respectful and competitive spirit in house competitions. Leaders carefully guide and train student 'listeners' who provide emotional support and mentorship to younger pupils. Pupils seek positions on the school council and meet with staff to represent the views of other pupils. Leaders respond positively to the school council by providing additional breaktime resources and changing the location for an annual camping expedition. Pupils learn that it is supportive and kind to provide help and time to others.

48. Leaders provide pupils with appropriate opportunities to learn about British institutions and the work they do to support society. For example, pupils are taught about Parliament and the role of government. The police and fire services visit the school and explain their work to keep local communities safe.

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49. Leaders in the early years demonstrate kindness and supportive attitudes so that children learn to treat others in a friendly manner. Children play and work collaboratively, taking care to listen to what others have to say. They share resources, such as playground equipment, so that everyone can play happily. When teachers hand out drinks and breaktime snacks, children remember to ask politely and show gratitude afterwards. Children learn to approach others cheerfully, politely and respectfully.

50. Leaders build and maintain positive links with the local community. The school choir, for example, entertain elderly people in residential homes. Pupils support charities by donating food items to the local foodbank and raising funds for a charity supporting newborn babies. Older pupils take part in The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme (DofE). They provide voluntary services, such as helping in charity shops and providing weekend sports coaching. Pupils learn that it is morally responsible to contribute positively to others.

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

51. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

52. Leaders promote a vigilant and thorough safeguarding culture throughout the school. The safeguarding policy is written clearly, carefully reviewed and reflects the latest statutory guidance. Governors provide systematic oversight of the school's safeguarding practices.

53. Leaders provide staff with effective induction training. Staff training includes information about child-on-child abuse, how to respond to any safeguarding concerns that may arise, as well as the 'Prevent' duty so that staff are alert to the dangers of extremism and radicalisation. Staff attend regular meetings during which safeguarding concerns are discussed. They are confident and share a consistent understanding of the school's safeguarding procedures.

54. Leaders with responsibility for safeguarding receive appropriate training for the role. Local safeguarding partners provide training to all staff so that the school's safeguarding procedures continue to be effective, consistent and reflect the latest statutory guidance. Leaders consult constructively with them and refer safeguarding concerns to them, if required. Clear and detailed safeguarding records are kept in accordance with latest statutory guidance.

55. The school provides pupils with appropriate ways to seek support. Pupils understand the importance of requesting help, if necessary. Younger pupils move their photograph to different emotions displayed in the classroom to let their teachers know how they are feeling. All pupils can speak to any teacher at the school. Older pupils can send an online message to staff. As a result, the emotional wellbeing of pupils is supported consistently well.

56. Pupils learn how to remain safe when online through assemblies, computing lessons and an online safety week. For example, pupils understand the importance of not sharing personal information, changing passwords regularly and reporting any unusual activity to a trusted adult. Older pupils learn about scam and phishing emails and the dangers of online viruses. Leaders implement a robust internet filtering and monitoring system. Any alerts are monitored and investigated swiftly.

57. Staff who work in the early years systematically follow the safeguarding requirements relating to working with young children. For example, staff mobile phones are securely locked away during the school day. Visitors to the early years are reminded to follow the school's digital policy.

58. Leaders effectively and systematically carry out all required recruitment checks on adults before they begin working at the school. These checks are recorded on a suitable single central record of appointments. Staff receive specific training so that the school's recruitment practices are robust and thorough.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

59. All the relevant Standards are met.

School details

School	Argyle House School
Department for Education number	394/6003
Address	Argyle House School 19-20 Thornhill Park Sunderland Tyne and Wear SR2 7LA
Phone number	0191 510 0726
Email address	office@argylehouseschool.co.uk
Website	www.argylehouse.co.uk
Proprietor	Argyle House Holdings Ltd
Chair	Mr John Forsyth
Headteacher	Mr John Sample
Age range	2 to 16
Number of pupils	186
Date of previous inspection	8 November 2024

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Information about the school

60. Argyle House School is a co-educational independent day school situated in Sunderland, Tyne and Wear. It comprises a senior and junior school. The school is part of the Forfar Education Group who provide governance and oversight. The school appointed a new headteacher in April 2025.

61. There are seven children in Nursery arranged into one class and fifteen children in Reception arranged into one class.

62. The school has identified 40 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). A small proportion of pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan).

63. The school has identified English as an additional language for a small number of pupils.

64. The school states its aims are to create a family atmosphere and for pupils to develop responsibility, resourcefulness, resilience, reasoning and respect. The school endeavours to develop pupils' abilities academically, socially, emotionally and physically. It seeks that each pupil should work hard to achieve their best, as reflected by the school's motto: 'work conquers all'.

Inspection details

Inspection dates	9 to 11 September 2025

65. A team of three inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

66. Inspection activities included:

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

67. 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

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