Focused Compliance and Educational Quality Inspection Report

Argyle House School

April 2022

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School's Details

School	Argyle House School			
DfE number	394/6003			
Address	Argyle House School 19–20 Thornhill Park Sunderland Tyne and Wear SR2 7LA			
Telephone number	01915 100726			
Email address	info@argylehouseschool.co.uk			
Headmaster	Mr Christopher Johnson			
Proprietor	Forfar Education Ltd			
Age range	3 to 16			
Number of pupils on roll	238			
	EYFS	25	**Juniors**	89
	Seniors	124		
Inspection dates	27 to 29 April 2022			

1. Background Information

About the school

1.1 Argyle House is a coeducational independent day school for pupils located in Sunderland, Tyne and Wear. The school comprises a senior and junior school, which includes a nursery and reception class. The school was founded in 1884 and moved to its current site in 1969. The school has remained in family ownership, with the current owners purchasing the school in September 2021 when the school became part of the Forfar Education Group, who are responsible for governance oversight.

1.2 The inspection took into account the circumstances faced by schools during the COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictions imposed by government guidance at various points of the pandemic.

What the school seeks to do

1.3 The school seeks to create a family atmosphere and to foster responsibility, resourcefulness, resilience, reasoning and respect. The school aims to provide facilities such as those found in larger schools, but with the aim of keeping class sizes small whilst offering each child the opportunity to learn and fully develop their abilities.

About the pupils

1.4 Pupils come from families with a range of professional and business backgrounds living in and around the city of Sunderland. Nationally standardised data provided by the school indicate that the ability of pupils in the junior and senior schools is above average for those taking the tests. The school has identified 31 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities, which include dyslexia and difficulties with literacy and numeracy. Some of these pupils receive additional specialist help. Four pupils have an education, health and care (EHC) plan. No pupils have English as an additional language (EAL). The school and parents together identify those pupils whom they consider to be the most able or talented in the school's population, and the number of these pupils varies over time. The curriculum is modified for these pupils to provide them with additional levels of challenge.

2. Regulatory Compliance Inspection

Preface

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is approved by the Secretary of State to inspect schools which are, or whose heads are, in membership of the associations which form the Independent Schools Council (ISC) and report on the extent to which they meet the Independent School Standards ('the standards') in the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014. Inspections of schools with early years settings not requiring registration also report whether the school complies with key provisions of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory framework. Additionally, inspections report on the school's accessibility plan under Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996. Inspections also comment on the progress made to meet any compliance action points set out in the school's most recent statutory inspection.

ISI inspections are also carried out under the arrangements of the ISC Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership.

This is a FOCUSED COMPLIANCE INSPECTION which was combined with an inspection of EDUCATIONAL QUALITY. The FOCUSED COMPLIANCE inspection reports only on the school's compliance with the standards. The standards represent minimum requirements and judgements are given either as **met** or as **not met**. All schools are required to meet all the standards applicable to them. Where the minimum requirements are not met, this is clearly indicated in the relevant section of the report and the school is required to take the actions specified. In this focused compliance inspection, key standards have been inspected in detail. These are the standards on safeguarding; measures to guard against bullying; arrangements for pupils' health and safety; arrangements to check the suitability of staff; the provision of information; the handling of parents' complaints; and other related aspects of leadership and management. The remaining standards and requirements are deemed to continue to be met unless evidence to the contrary has been found.

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.

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 published reports in this document but will have been considered by the team in reaching its judgements.

Links to the standards and requirements can be found here: The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework.

Key findings

2.1 The school meets the standards in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, and relevant requirements of the statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage, and associated requirements, and no further action is required as a result of this inspection.

PART 1 – Quality of education provided

2.2 In the junior school, the school's own framework for assessment confirms that teaching enables pupils to make good progress in the context of Part 1 paragraph 3(a).

2.3 At GCSE in the years 2019 to 2021, performance has confirmed that teaching enables pupils to make good progress in the context of Part 1 paragraph 3(a).

2.4 The curriculum is documented, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work for the pupils and covers the required breadth of material. The teaching enables pupils to make good progress, encompasses effective behaviour management and is supported by suitable resources. A suitable framework for the assessment of pupils' performance is in place.

2.5 Pupils receive relationships education in the junior school and relationships and sex education in the senior school, except in so far as they are lawfully excused. The school has consulted parents and published a written statement of its policy which has regard to the relevant statutory guidance.

2.6 The standards relating to the quality of education [paragraphs 1–4] are met.

PART 2 – Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

2.7 Principles and values are actively promoted which facilitate the personal development of pupils as responsible, tolerant, law-abiding citizens.

2.8 The standard relating to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development [paragraph 5] is met.

PART 3 – Welfare, health and safety of pupils

2.9 Arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils by means that pay due regard to current statutory guidance; good behaviour is promoted; bullying is prevented so far as reasonably practicable; health and safety requirements are met, including those relating to fire safety; provision is made for first aid. Pupils are properly supervised; admission and attendance registers are maintained, as required, and there is a strategic approach to risk assessment. A disability access plan is in place.

2.10 The standards relating to welfare, health and safety [paragraphs 6–16], the requirement of Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010, and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996 are met.

PART 4 – Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

2.11 The school makes appropriate checks to ensure the suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors, and a register is kept as required

2.12 The standards relating to the suitability of those in contact with pupils at the school [paragraphs 17–21] are met.

PART 5 – Premises of and accommodation at schools

2.13 Suitable toilet and changing facilities, and showering facilities where required by the standard, and appropriate accommodation for pupils' medical and therapy needs are provided. The premises are maintained to a standard commensurate with health and safety; acoustics and lighting are appropriate; water provision is adequate. Suitable outdoor space is provided for physical education and outdoor play.

2.14 The standards relating to the premises and accommodation [paragraphs 22–31] are met.

PART 6 – Provision of information

2.15 A range of information is published, provided or made available to parents, inspectors and the Department for Education. This includes details about the proprietor, the ethos of the school and the curriculum, and of the school's arrangements for admission, behaviour and exclusions, bullying, health and safety, first aid, details of the complaints procedure, and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year, and the provision for any with education, health and care plans or English as an additional language. It also includes particulars of the school's academic performance during the preceding school year, inspection reports and (for parents only) a report at least annually of their own child's progress. The safeguarding policy is posted on the school's website.

2.16 The standard relating to the provision of information [paragraph 32] is met.

PART 7 – Manner in which complaints are handled

2.17 Parental complaints, if any, are handled effectively through a three-stage process, (informal, formal and a hearing before a panel of three, one of whom is independent of the school). Each stage has clear time scales, and at the third stage the panel can make findings and recommendations which are communicated to the complainant. Records are kept appropriately, including of any action taken, whether or not a complaint is successful.

2.18 The standard relating to the handling of complaints [paragraph 33] is met.

PART 8 – Quality of leadership in and management of schools

2.19 The proprietor ensures that the leadership and management demonstrate good skills and knowledge, and fulfil their responsibilities effectively, so that the other standards are consistently met, and they actively promote the well-being of the pupils.

2.20 The standard relating to leadership and management of the school [paragraph 34] is met.

3. Educational Quality Inspection

Preface

The EDUCATIONAL QUALITY inspection reports 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.

The headline judgements apply one of the ISI descriptors 'excellent', 'good', 'sound' or 'unsatisfactory'.

Where necessary, National Curriculum nomenclature is used 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:

School name	*National Curriculum name*
Nursery	Nursery
Reception	Reception
P1	Yr 1
P2	Yr 2
P3	Yr 3
P4	Yr 4
P5	Yr 5
P6	Yr 6
S1	Yr 7
S2	Yr 8
S3	Yr 9
S4	Yr 10
S5	Yr 11

Key findings

3.1 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is good.

- Pupils display excellent attitudes evident in their enthusiasm and motivation which strongly supports their learning.
- The attainment and progress of pupils throughout the school are good as a result of supportive teaching and appropriate tracking systems; however, this is not always supported by consistent challenge for pupils of all abilities.
- Pupils have highly developed communication skills and apply them with confidence and sensitivity to their learning across the curriculum.
- Pupils with SEND make good progress because they are well supported through targeted strategies to support their learning.

- Pupils have strong numeracy skills and can apply their knowledge and skills in mathematics effectively to other areas of learning.

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

- Pupils have a highly developed sense of responsibility to the school community and enjoy contributing to the family feel of the school through a sense of happiness and cohesion.
- Pupils' behaviour is exemplary; they are well mannered and polite.
- Pupils are highly effective when working with others to achieve common goals.
- Pupils demonstrate excellent levels of self-awareness, maturity and independence.
- Pupils have an excellent knowledge of health and well-being and understand the importance of living a balanced lifestyle.

Recommendations

3.3 The school should make the following improvements.

- Ensure that pupils' achievement is enhanced by consistently providing pupils with high levels of challenge commensurate with their abilities.
- Ensure that recent initiatives such as the pupil 'success criteria', designed to enhance pupil performance, are more fully understood and embedded across all age groups.

The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements

3.4 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is good.

3.5 The overall attainment of pupils of all ages, including those with SEND, demonstrates good progress and successful fulfilment of the school's aims. Pupils' progress in lessons is facilitated by focused and well-resourced teaching alongside a culture where pupils are determined to make the best use of their time. Children in the EYFS make excellent progress and many reach expected levels in their early learning goals by the end of Reception. The junior school does not take part in national curriculum tests but on the evidence available including the results from standardised tests, lesson observations and work scrutiny, their achievement is above their level of ability. Data produced by the school demonstrate that pupils perform in line with, or above their expected levels. In particular the school has seen a consistent increase in the percentage of pupils in English and mathematics achieving higher grades than their predicted attainment. Examination results at GCSE for 2017–2019 were above the national average for maintained schools and centre-assessed grades in 2020 and teacher-assessed grades in 2021 show results consistent with this attainment. A significant number of SEND pupils achieve at higher levels in their examinations than predicted.

3.6 Throughout the junior and senior schools, pupils respond well to the balanced curriculum. Pupils demonstrate effective learning skills in most cases, when they are given work that is matched to their ability and when the appropriate support and challenge is offered in lessons. Senior school pupils, for example, are able to cross-reference topics using their information and communication technology (ICT) skills, as observed in mathematics, science and physical education (PE) lessons. Pupils showed inspectors how the tracking and intervention systems employed by their teachers support their progress. They said that in most cases, targeted interventions and clear direction on where improvements could be made have a positive effect on their progress. Almost all parents, in response to the questionnaires, agreed that the supportive teaching enables their children to make good progress. The recent 'success criteria' initiative for assessing and promoting pupil performance is not fully embedded across all age groups in the school, however, pupils of all ages did speak positively about their learning experience. They commented that, in the best teaching, they are encouraged

through interesting and sometimes provocative discussions to explore beyond the bounds of the syllabus. Their attitude to study is supported by teaching that encourages pupils to believe in what they do.

3.7 Pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding are well developed across all areas of learning. Pupils benefit from a broad and balanced curriculum which is supported and enhanced by a comprehensive extra-curricular programme, available to all age groups. Pupils learnt most effectively when teaching developed pupils' confidence to hypothesise and analyse, synthesise and engage in lessons, although this is not always consistent as pupils move through the school. In a business studies lesson in Year 11, pupils successfully demonstrated their ability to compile and manipulate basic income accounts, using higher-order thinking skills in a practical situation. In response to the questionnaire, a small minority of pupils did not agree that lessons are interesting. In the large majority of lessons observed, pupils demonstrated high levels of engagement and interaction with their teachers, and they were keen to learn and benefit from the opportunities available to them. However, in some lessons the level of challenge and pace was more limited and restricted the learning opportunities.

3.8 Pupils are confident and sophisticated communicators across all age groups, because they are encouraged to express their views in all mediums without fear of criticism. Young children in Reception can say their phonic sounds with correct pronunciation and Year 1 pupils described effectively how they would compare the jaw strength of dinosaurs. In a Year 7 English lesson pupils showed proficiency in their written skills when undertaking an independent piece of writing about a selected 'special place'. Pupils' excellent communication skills, as seen in the morning discussion periods, is as a result of the confidence in their ability to actively participate in assemblies, class presentations, debates and taking on leadership roles.

3.9 Observation of pupils' work shows that they continue to make good and often rapid progress with their English and mathematics as they move up from the junior to the senior school. Older pupils are able to transfer skills to other areas of learning. For example, pupils effectively discussed the impact of war on mental health in a humanities lesson and the ecological impact of climate change in geography. Pupils throughout the senior school exhibit strong skills and imagination in art, drama, and music. Evidence from a Year 11 drama group working on the production '*DNA*' effectively displayed their ability to transfer their learnt skills successfully to a production performance.

3.10 Pupils' numeracy skills are well developed across all age groups, including in EYFS, as a result of the importance placed on mathematics as a key subject and the encouragement of pupils to develop and apply their numeracy skills in new and unfamiliar contexts. For example, in a Year 9 science lesson, pupils used mathematics with skill and confidence, to plot graphs precisely and draw lines of best fit. In year 6 pupils could effectively convert mixed numbers into improper fractions to solve different problems. Discussions with pupils indicated that the use of numerical skills on a cross-curricular basis is commonplace and integrated into the pupils' skill sets. Pupils enjoy using mathematics in real life situations as illustrated through the school enterprise club, which requires pupils to successfully operate a small business. Pupils also use their numerical skills to great effect outside the classroom, such as in preparing for Duke of Edinburgh's Award (DoE) expeditions, where they are required to estimate route lengths for each section of a hike or fell walk.

3.11 Pupils' achievements in external competitions, in gaining other academic distinctions beyond examinations, and their success in art, music, drama and the arts are excellent across both schools. Pupils compete successfully in rugby, football, gymnastics, and most notably in skiing in which all pupils engage from the age of seven. As a small school, pupils compete very favourably at both regional and national level. The school currently has four gymnasts attending a centre of excellence, a British karate champion and two pupils attached to a local football academy. Pupils' high level of success in sport and non-sporting activities is promoted by their enthusiasm to represent their school together with the encouragement given by staff and leaders. Pupils play representative games across many sports, and this is as a result of the enthusiastic coaching provided by the staff and the pupils themselves who are driven by a 'can do' culture. Pupils recognise and value the opportunities afforded

them, which means that everyone can become involved irrespective of ability. Pupils say that participation in the many lunchtime and after school clubs on offer including choral groups, music and theatrical productions offers them opportunities to collaborate with each other across year groups. This results in the promotion of teamwork and the enhancement of their social interaction skills whilst boosting their self-confidence.

3.12 Pupils make good use of the ICT available, supplemented by access to a range of virtual learning systems as seen across the schools. Junior school pupils make use of ICT devices regularly and effectively which greatly enhances their creative and research skills, for example as seen in the work scrutiny, in which pupils were creating music and in Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education. (PSHE) when researching different British Paralympians. Pupils in the senior school have access to a range of electronic devices and make effective use of the ICT available, supplemented by access to a range of virtual learning systems as seen in lessons, including in a Year 10 ICT lesson in which pupils confidently used software packages to complete a research task. Pupils say that use of ICT is key to their progress because of the research, organisational and teacher feedback possibilities it enables them to access. Pupils' use of, and competence in, ICT has improved significantly during the lockdown periods, as seen in the pupils' highly effective use of online learning resources and their response to regularly set internet-based homework.

3.13 Pupils' attitudes to learning are highly positive, they take pride in their work and show initiative and independence, whilst being keen to work collaboratively. This was evidenced in the work scrutiny in which EYFS, junior, senior pupils showed inspectors evidence of independent learning in both their workbooks and in a number of cases on their electronic devices. Representatives from the school council were instrumental in encouraging senior managers to allow classroom set ups to be reconfigured for group activities and to allow pupils to work together to solve common goals. In discussion pupils said this had been successful and they felt that this was a good example of how their teachers responded to the pupil voice.

The quality of the pupils' personal development

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

3.15 Pupils show excellent levels of responsibility, resourcefulness, resilience, reasoning and respect, which strongly supports the school's aim to create a caring family atmosphere. Pupils of all ages respond willingly to the high standards and expectations set by the leadership, teaching and proprietors, and there is a real sense of community and shared focus. SEND pupils commented that they valued the assistance of the learning support department in helping them succeed both academically but also socially. Pupils develop a strong sense of personal confidence and high self-esteem as they go through the school. They report that this is a result of being in a small school community which is kind, friendly and supportive. All pupils are reflective and recent work on 'success criteria' has better enabled pupils to have a clear understanding of their strengths and weaknesses in most areas.

3.16 Pupils have a highly developed sense of awareness of the importance of the personal decisions they make. Junior school pupils are quick and eager to help; they make suggestions in the classroom and at play to broaden their learning. Children in the EYFS thrive when they have a free choice of activity, and older pupils are allowed to take the initiative to see where their learning can take them. This was demonstrated by Year 8 pupils in PE in which pupils undertook an assessment of each other's skill levels in badminton. Senior pupils fully understand that their subject choices for GCSE examinations, and that strong academic performance will help determine their future choices. Pupils of all ages use the opportunities they are given to make decisions to help the school and the local community, most notably through the school council. Pupils, in discussion with inspectors, spoke with pride regarding their influence on school decisions through their school council activities. Pupils are proud of the money they have raised for charity and being able to vote on the charities they wish their individual forms to support on a termly basis.

3.17 The spiritual value of togetherness is highly celebrated and has been particularly appreciated by the pupils in the lockdown periods over the last year through remote learning activities, when they were unable to have direct contact with their friends. Younger pupils share their knowledge and understanding of their faith with their peers. Muslim, Jewish and Christian pupils share their beliefs with each other in three weekly timetabled form discussion periods and in assemblies and, as a result, pupils gain a deeper understanding of tolerance and become more accepting of each other's faiths. Pupils are encouraged to prompt issues for group discussions, promoting a sense of ownership of topics such as cultures and religious beliefs and as a result individual pupils have led whole school assemblies on topics such as racism, religious beliefs and LGBTQ+ matters. Pupils show an excellent appreciation for the arts and for nature, as seen in the high-quality pieces of artwork displayed in both the senior and junior schools. This is because effective teaching encourages the articulation and exploration of the non-material aspects of life such as the natural world.

3.18 Pupils demonstrate great respect for the system of rules in school and can distinguish right from wrong from an early age, exemplified by their excellent behaviour. All pupils are keenly aware of the impact of their shared 'language of learning' and the need to demonstrate the attributes of the pupils' *6R* core values in their learning and associated personal values, which are part of the school aims. Discussion with pupils confirms that they really do try hard to live up to these values. Pupils show a keen sense of fair play and are passionate about the importance of the family ethos of the school. This is reflected in the pupils' clear understanding of their behaviour and code of conduct responsibilities. A small minority of pupils in their response to the questionnaire disagreed that pupils are kind and respect one another. Pupils in discussions confirmed that, most of the time, pupils do treat each other kindly and with respect, a view confirmed by observation of the pupils as they moved about the school. Pupils further commented that when pupils are occasionally unkind to each other, the pastoral support which is always provided refocuses them, resulting in the promotion and encouragement of positive behaviour. School council members' excellent attitudes and willingness to support their fellow pupils was observed through older pupils giving presentations to the younger pupils. For example, a pupil leading a discussion on diversity issues which had a powerful and effective impact on the pupil audience.

3.19 Pupils are highly socially aware, and this is a real strength of the school. They provide much support to their peers, both academically and in terms of developing wider skills. This is a consequence of the school culture which promotes easy relationships and social confidence. Much of this support is unprompted and spontaneous as seen in older pupils helping to coach younger pupils in sports, music, and in academic and project work. Pupils through the school council have actioned 'chill out' days, which involve pupils in their form groups devising day out activities dedicated to improving pupils mental health awareness, an example being a form beach outing. Pupils readily seek out opportunities to hold positions of responsibility, including as form leaders, members of the school council and as sports team leaders which pupils felt helped develop their leadership potential. Collaboration is a genuine strength of the school; pupils work well together in many areas of school life, including during lessons and through enrichment activities. For example, EYFS pupils readily share play equipment with each other in the outdoor school and Year 1 pupils willingly share computers. Pupils talk enthusiastically about their experiences of the annual school camp and the DofE programme and the spirit of collaboration which it engenders. Pupils value the opportunities they have to become involved with the local community, to engage in charitable fund-raising, working with senior citizens in care homes and assistance with local foodbanks, which enabled them to enhance their social development skills.

3.20 Pupils form very positive and productive relationships with each other and their teachers, irrespective of culture or background. Most pupils show high levels of respect for the culture and beliefs of others and expect to receive that same respect in return. This is evident in discussions with pupils and results in them not only respecting cultural and individual differences but also enjoying celebrating them as evidenced in discussion with pupils who are part of minority diversity and faith groups in the school. Pupils feel empowered to talk, express their feelings and approach staff if they have any concerns, as

a result of the teachers encouraging pupils to celebrate and promote equality and diversity and the different cultures in their classrooms. Pupils have a good understanding of matters relating to relationships and cultural issues of race and gender as seen in form group meetings and PSHE lessons. For example, in a Year 11 form discussion group on LGBTQ+ and diversity issues in which pupils were clear that any disrespectful behaviour was considered as unacceptable.

3.21 Pupils have a high level of appreciation of how to stay safe and understand how to be physically and mentally healthy, particularly in terms of diet, exercise and a balanced lifestyle. Pupils' health and well-being are strongly promoted because the school recognises the possible impact of mental illness and stress on pupils. Additionally, wellness clubs promote focus days as part of an annual health and safety and healthy lifestyle week, offering a wide range of activities including road safety, first aid, yoga, art appreciation and boxing. Pupils at all levels appreciate the opportunity to participate in individual sports and physical activities which extend their skills and allow them to develop an appreciation that an active lifestyle is beneficial to mental well-being. Pupils taking part in sport is as a result of the encouragement of their teachers but also the keenness of the pupils and their willingness to compete and work as a team. The overwhelming majority of pupils agreed that they feel safe in the school and know how to be safe online. They feel that they are well supported in their mental health, citing examples of how they have been supported through difficult times. Pupils said that they felt particularly well supported during the remote learning periods, asserting that the teaching staff made a concerted effort to check and monitor their mental health and well-being during these periods. In the pre-inspection questionnaires the vast majority of the parents felt that the school was well governed, led and managed and pupils in discussion said that they highly valued the fact that the pupils' voice was both listened and responded to.

4. Inspection Evidence

4.1 The inspectors observed lessons, had discussions with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with members of staff and with the proprietor, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended form meetings and assemblies. Inspectors visited the facilities for the youngest pupils, together with the learning support and educational resource areas. Inspectors considered the responses of parents, staff and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires. The inspectors examined curriculum and other documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Mr Tony Halliwell	Reporting inspector
Mr Devin Cassidy	Compliance team inspector (Headmaster, HMC school)
Mrs Claire Preece	Team inspector (Deputy head, HMC school)
Mr Gavin Sinnott	Team inspector (Director of studies, IAPS school)