



**ISI** Independent  
Schools  
Inspectorate

## **Report for a Progress Monitoring Visit**

**The Chorister School**

**April 2021**



## School's details

<b>School name</b>	The Chorister School			
<b>DfE number</b>	840/6001			
<b>Registered charity number</b>	1023407			
<b>Address</b>	The Chorister School The College Durham County Durham DH1 3EL			
<b>Telephone number</b>	01913 842935			
<b>Email address</b>	enquiries@thechoristerschool.com			
<b>Headmaster</b>	Mr Ian Wicks			
<b>Chair of governors</b>	Mr Rob Ribchester			
<b>Age Range</b>	3 to 13			
<b>Number of pupils on roll</b>	140			
	<b>Day pupils</b>	125	<b>Boarders</b>	15
	<b>EYFS</b>	17	<b>Juniors</b>	92
	<b>Seniors</b>	31		
<b>Date of visit</b>	26 April 2021			

## 1. Introduction

### Characteristics of the school

- 1.1 The Chorister School is an independent co-educational boarding and day school situated in the centre of Durham. The school was founded to educate choristers who sing the daily services in the cathedral. The school legally merged with Durham School in February 2021 but each school remains operationally independent until the application for a material change has been approved, but with a single governing body. The school has thirty-seven pupils who require support for special educational needs and/or disabilities, of whom one has an education, health and care plan. No pupils speak English as an additional language. The school's previous inspection was a regulatory compliance inspection in March 2020.

### Purpose of the visit

- 1.2 This was an unannounced progress monitoring visit at the request of the Department for Education (DfE) to check that the school has fully implemented the action plan submitted following the regulatory compliance inspection in March 2020.

Regulations which were the focus of the visit	Team judgements
ISSR Part 3, paragraphs 7 (safeguarding) and 8 (safeguarding of boarders); NMS 11;	Met
ISSR Part 4, paragraphs 18 to 20 (suitability of staff and proprietors); NMS 14	Met
ISSR Part 6, paragraph 32(1)(c) (provision of information)	Met
ISSR Part 8, paragraph 34 (leadership and management); NMS 13	Met

## 2. Inspection findings

### Welfare, health and safety of pupils – safeguarding [ISSR Part 3, paragraphs 7 and 8; NMS 11]

#### Safeguarding policy

- 2.1 The school meets the requirements.
- 2.2 The school has an appropriate policy for safeguarding which provides suitable arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils at the school.

#### Safeguarding implementation

- 2.3 The school meets the standards.
- 2.4 Implementation of all aspects of the school's safeguarding procedures is effective in providing appropriate support for the needs of both day and boarding pupils, including children in the EYFS.
- 2.5 Safeguarding procedures are implemented to safeguard children at risk and those in need. Staff show effective understanding of their responsibilities, including with regard to peer-on-peer abuse and any such abuse linked to respect for those with protected characteristics. Staff show appropriate awareness of the staff code of conduct, whistleblowing policy and safeguarding procedures. They have a suitable knowledge of the thresholds for reporting potential issues. Staff have a clear understanding of guidelines in boarding and confirm that pupils have no access to staff accommodation. The school has clear protocols to mitigate the risk to pupils who daily cross a public World Heritage Site to access the school buildings and the cathedral. Staff are aware of who to go to if they have a concern or receive a disclosure and also that they can make a direct referral to children's services if necessary. Both school and cathedral staff are clear about their respective safeguarding responsibilities for choristers.
- 2.6 The safeguarding policy is being reviewed to reflect the context of the newly merged school. It already includes suitable definitions of abuse. It provides appropriate guidance regarding possible abuse by one or more pupils against another pupil, including linking such abuse to bullying. Discussion with the designated safeguarding lead (DSL) for the school confirmed that pupils receive help to address risks and prevent issues escalating. The DSL acts on and refers the early signs of risk or need, monitors any potential for radicalisation, and ensure the school listens to the views of individual pupils as required by Keeping Children Safe in Education. This is confirmed in written evidence from suitable records. Staff with particular responsibilities for boarding monitor children in need effectively. Pupils receive guidance on staying safe and show understanding of what they have been taught, including in relation to e-safety, and monitoring and filtering of technology is effective. They confirm that the school listens and takes prompt action when they express concerns.
- 2.7 The safeguarding policy gives contact details for required local agencies. Suitable recruitment procedures for staff are outlined within the safeguarding policy and detailed in a separate recruitment policy. The training for the DSLs is in line with local requirements and statutory advice and up to date. Training in safeguarding for teaching and non-teaching staff, including relevant members of the cathedral staff, is of sufficient quality and frequency. Adults with responsibility for boarders are given additional specific training and guidance. Central records of staff attendance at training are kept systematically.
- 2.8 Suitable arrangements for handling allegations against staff, senior leaders or the proprietor, and potential misconduct, are included in safeguarding procedures; they include seeking immediate advice from the local authority designated safeguarding officer (LADO). Records show that procedures are followed effectively, and the school follows up actions promptly. The school understands its role in reporting any person to relevant regulatory bodies if circumstances require it.

- 2.9 A governor with appropriate expertise maintains a close working contact with the DSL and annually contacts a review of the effectiveness of the safeguarding arrangements on behalf of the governors.

#### **Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors [ISSR Part 4, paragraphs 18–21; NMS 14]**

- 2.10 The school meets the standards.
- 2.11 All appropriate checks on the suitability of staff, proprietors and other adults have now been completed before they have taken up the role. The school and the cathedral have a working protocol to ensure the safe recruitment of musicians and other adults who will come into contact with choristers. Contractors send the school up-to-date information on checks they have undertaken on their employees, and the school makes further checks on arrival.
- 2.12 The school maintains correctly an accurate single central register of appointments which includes the dates on which all checks have been completed, and the information is gradually being replicated to a system for the merged school.

#### **Provision of information [ISSR Part 6, paragraph 32(1)(c)]**

- 2.13 The school meets the requirements for providing information relating to safeguarding to parents. Particulars of the arrangements for safeguarding are published on the school's website.

#### **Quality of leadership and management [ISSR Part 8, paragraph 34; NMS 13]**

- 2.14 The school meets the standards.
- 2.15 Appropriate procedures are implemented which allow the proprietor and senior leaders and governors to manage safeguarding and welfare arrangements and monitor compliance with standards and other statutory advice, including those concerned with safeguarding and staff recruitment. The school has ensured that safeguarding and recruitment protocols for the cathedral staff who come across pupils now follow statutory guidance. In this way the leadership and management fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently. The strategic and operational planning for the proposed merger actively promotes the well-being of pupils.

### **3. Regulatory action points**

- 3.1 For the regulations which were the focus of this visit, the school meets all of the requirements of the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools 2015 and requirements of the Early Years Statutory Framework, and no further action is required as a result of this visit.

## **4. Summary of evidence**

- 4.1 The inspectors held discussions with the headmaster, senior leaders and other members of staff and met with a governor. They spoke with pupils. They visited different areas of the school and scrutinised a range of documentation, records and policies.