



25<sup>th</sup> January 2010

Dear Parents

Our Interim Inspection Report has arrived and I have pleasure in enclosing your copy of the full document. The Report is also available on the school website. Academic standards, pupil behaviour, relationships within the school, pastoral care and pupils' personal development, all emerge as strengths. We know these to be strong features of our school, but it is reassuring when Inspectors concur. The number of aspects described as 'good', 'excellent' and 'outstanding' is both notable and heartening. I would like to thank the pupils, the staff in all areas, and parents for your valuable contributions to this outcome.

Just as Polam Hall was one of the first schools to undergo an ISI2 Inspection in 2006, we were also in the vanguard for ISI3. This third cycle of Independent School Inspections is in its infancy. The new system involves just 5 days notice for schools, and is centred on regulatory matters. I am sure many of you have been aware of the ongoing debate in the media relating to the current inspection regime. The exercise is certainly rigorous and the experience very demanding.

You may be assured that the Governors and the Senior Management Team will use the Inspectors' comments wisely to inform our future planning and will respond appropriately to the recommendations made.

Any parent who would like to respond to any aspect of the Report is welcome to do so. Your comments, as ever, would be warmly received. I hope you will enjoy reading Polam Hall's ISI Report 2010.

Best wishes.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Marie Green'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped 'M' and a long, sweeping 'G'.

M Green (Miss)  
Head



# **INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE**

**POLAM HALL SCHOOL**

**INTERIM INSPECTION**

# INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

## Polam Hall School

Full Name of School	<b>Polam Hall School</b>		
DCSF Number	<b>841/6000</b>		
EYFS Number	<b>EY400980</b>		
Registered Charity Number	<b>527369</b>		
Address	<b>Polam Hall School Grange Road Darlington County Durham DL15PA</b>		
Telephone Number	<b>01325 463383</b>		
Fax Number	<b>01325 383539</b>		
Email Address	<b>head@polamhall.com</b>		
Headmistress	<b>Miss Marie Green</b>		
Chair of Governors	<b>Mr Christopher D W Pratt</b>		
Age Range	<b>2 to 18</b>		
Total Number of Pupils	<b>309</b>		
Gender of Pupils	<b>Girls 2-18; Boys 2-5 and 16-18</b>		
Numbers by Age	0-2 (EYFS):	<b>8</b>	5-11: <b>87</b>
	3-5 (EYFS):	<b>21</b>	11-18: <b>193</b>
Number of Day Pupils	<b>270</b>		
Number of Boarders	Total:	<b>39</b>	
	Full:	<b>36</b>	Weekly: <b>3</b>
EYFS Gender	<b>Mixed</b>		
Inspection Dates	<b>17<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> November 2009</b>		

## PREFACE

This report is according to the *Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI)* schedule for **INTERIM** inspections. The inspection is a two day visit with a focus on compliance with regulatory requirements. ISI inspections occur every three years and have two formats, interim and standard, which usually occur in an alternating pattern. The school's next inspection will therefore follow the standard schedule, which includes two visits totalling five days and places greater emphasis on the quality of education and care in addition to reporting on regulatory compliance. The school's previous inspection was in January/February 2006.

The ISI is the body approved by the Government for the purpose of inspecting schools belonging to Independent Schools Council (ISC) Associations and reporting on compliance with the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as subsequently amended with effect from January 2005, May 2007 and February 2009. The range of these Regulations is as follows.

- (a) The quality of education provided (Curriculum)
- (b) The quality of education provided (Teaching)
- (c) The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils
- (d) The welfare, health and safety of pupils
- (e) The suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors
- (f) The premises and accommodation
- (g) The provision of information
- (h) The manner in which complaints are to be handled

Legislation additional to the welfare, health and safety Standard is as follows.

- (i) The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA).
- (ii) Race, gender and sexual discrimination legislation.
- (iii) Corporal punishment.

The inspection was also carried out under the arrangements of the ISC Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership.

ISI is also approved to inspect the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), which was introduced in September 2008 and applies to all children in England from birth to 31<sup>st</sup> August following their fifth birthday. This report evaluates the extent to which the setting fulfils the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework published by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and follows the requirements of the Childcare Act 2006 as subsequently amended.

A specific inspection of boarding was not carried out and the report does not contain judgements on the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools. Any comments on boarding arising from this inspection are in the context of the school as a whole. The existing report on boarding was produced by the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) and can be found at [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk) under Inspection reports/Boarding schools.

The inspection does not examine the financial viability of the school or investigate its accounting procedures. The inspectors check the school's health and safety procedures and comment on any significant hazards they encounter: they do not carry out an exhaustive health and safety examination. Their inspection of the premises is from an educational perspective and does not include in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features.

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## 1. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

- 1.1 Polam Hall School is a day and boarding school serving Darlington and the wider area. The school was founded in 1854 and is set in a Georgian mansion set in nineteen acres of parkland close to the town centre. Polam Hall was incorporated in 1938 and became a registered charity in 1964, managed by a governing body. Formerly predominantly a boarding school for girls, most are now day pupils. There are 309 pupils on roll currently, aged two to eighteen. Boys have been admitted since 2004 to the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and to the sixth form. Before- and after-school care is offered to all pupils. The school aims to be a caring, tolerant and supportive community to which all contribute, where individual achievement and self confidence are valued, and where pupils are encouraged to develop the widest possible range of skills, and have opportunities to show leadership. The present head was appointed in 2004.
- 1.2 Most day pupils come from Darlington and the surrounding areas, from business or professional backgrounds. About a tenth of pupils are from minority ethnic groups, mainly Chinese. Standardised test results indicate that the ability profile of the school, up to Year 11, is above the national average, though a wide range is evident. The sixth-form pupils' ability profile is in line with the national average. Three pupils have statements of special educational need (SEN) and the school has identified a further 30 as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD). Twenty-five pupils learn English as an additional language (EAL).
- 1.3 National Curriculum (NC) nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school. The year group nomenclature used by the school in the junior school is that of the NC. The year-group nomenclature of the Early Years Foundation Stage and the Senior School and the NC equivalents are shown in the following table:

### ***Early Years Foundation Stage***

School	NC name
Nursery	2-3 years
Lower Foundation	3-4 years
Upper Foundation	4-5 years

### ***Senior School***

School	NC name
Lower 4	Year 7
Upper 4	Year 8
Lower 5	Year 9
Middle 5	Year 10
Upper 5	Year 11
Lower 6	Year 12
Upper 6	Year 13

## **2. THE SUCCESS OF THE SCHOOL**

### **The quality of the pupils' achievements and their learning, attitudes and basic skills**

- 2.1 Day and boarding pupils throughout the school make good progress in their learning in relation to their generally above average ability. The school's GCSE results over the last three years for which comparative data are available are high when compared with the national average for all maintained schools. Most pupils achieved five or more GCSE grades A\*-C including mathematics and English. Pupils also do very well in creative and sporting pursuits. The A-level results over the same three-year period have been moderate, but inspection evidence shows that pupils now leave the school with examination success in A-level that is high in relation to the pupils' more modest ability profile at this stage. All pupils in recent years have achieved places at the universities or higher education institutions of their choice, a testament to their success. Literacy and numeracy skills are strong throughout the school. The pupils' skills in information and communication technology (ICT), though good, are not so fully developed, reflecting the more limited opportunities pupils are given to use ICT to support their work in other subjects. Pupils express themselves clearly. They are articulate and have well-developed skills of analysis. The pupils' good achievement is in part due to their exemplary attitudes to learning. They quickly develop confidence, settle promptly to work, and their behaviour is excellent. Pupils work very well collaboratively, and show confidence in asking searching questions to ensure their understanding. They show enjoyment, energetic application and perseverance.
- 2.2 The excellent, well-planned curriculum includes a broad range of extra-curricular activities, supporting the school's aims to encourage pupils to develop the widest possible range of skills. Residential trips and day visits provide pupils with additional valuable experiences which they then apply in the classroom. For instance, in Year 12 art, students experiment with various textural and architectural styles studied during an art gallery visit. Before- and after-school care offers good additional support for learning. The good teaching enables pupils of all abilities, including those with SEN, LDD and EAL, to learn and think for themselves, and encourages them to try hard in their work. Throughout the school, teachers know their subjects very well. They are skilled in asking questions that encourage pupils to think. Teachers know their pupils' strengths and weaknesses well. Teachers' marking is often good, especially in the junior school where it more frequently summarises achievement and points the way forward. Regular assessment and external examinations enable the school to evaluate performance effectively against national norms.

### **The quality of the pupils' personal development**

- 2.3 The sense of a shared and warm, caring, community is palpable throughout the school and this underpins the pupils' well-honed personal development. Pupils' spiritual awareness is extremely well developed. They show tolerance and respect for those from different cultural and religious backgrounds and this helps develop their high levels of self-esteem and confidence. Friendships form across age ranges. Pupils understand that rules are necessary both in school and in the wider context. Behaviour throughout the school is excellent. Pupils' charitable work shows their understanding of the global community and their concern for those less fortunate than themselves. Pupils are eager to accept responsibility, for instance as

house captains or monitors. They are knowledgeable about public institutions and services. They gain good understanding of how democracy works, for instance through involvement in a civic society in school, which provides opportunities to ask questions of local government councillors. They contribute to relevant decision-making in school through the school council and the boarding council. Cultural awareness is good through pupils' knowledge and understanding of the art, music and literature of other cultures, and pupils draw on other cultures within the school to broaden their understanding further.

- 2.4 Highly effective pastoral care is evident and supports pupils very well. Relationships between staff and pupils and among pupils are excellent. Pupils say they feel confident that there is an adult to turn to should they have a problem with which they need help. They say that bullying is extremely rare. 'We're all good friends and get on well together,' was a frequent comment in discussions. Although school staff are wholeheartedly committed to the wellbeing of the pupils, nevertheless, some of the statutory checks had not been carried out at the time of the inspection. The school is dealing with these expediently. Risk assessments have been completed on all areas of school life. The child protection policy is comprehensive and all staff have received training at the appropriate level. Appropriate measures have been taken to reduce the risk of fire and other hazards and a well-equipped medical room is provided for those pupils who fall ill during the school day. Attendance and admission registers are completed correctly and the accessibility plan for those with special educational needs or a disability details the improvements which the school intends to make. School meals are nutritious and pupils are taught to understand the need for healthy eating and physical exercise.
- 2.5 Parents and pupils say they are very happy with the boarding experience provided. Older boarders are especially well prepared for life beyond school because they are encouraged to be independent and take responsibility for the running of the three boarding households. Relationships in boarding are excellent. Accommodation is satisfactory and additional activities provided for boarders, when the day pupils are not there, are sufficient.

### **The effectiveness of governance, leadership and management**

- 2.6 Governance is satisfactory. Governors are committed to the school. A suitable range of committees ensures that business is covered efficiently. Governors are kept informed of the school's progress, receiving regular reports from the headmistress at termly meetings which enable them to make informed financial decisions concerning human and material resources. The governing body oversees welfare, health and safety, but relies too heavily on the school leaders to make sure that policies and procedures for which governors are responsible, such as safeguarding and suitability checks, are accurately constructed and implemented. Not all checks had been completed at the time of the inspection. A centralised register records appropriately the recruitment checks undertaken on the appointment of staff. Overall, the school is led and managed satisfactorily, including the EYFS. Strong features include the sharing of information on academic and pastoral matters between staff. The leaders' vision is portrayed in the school development plan that is the result of the contribution of all staff. However, the plan does not define clear, costed priorities well enough and so does not provide a firm enough footing for the future. Appraisal is focused on professional development and good checks are made on the quality of teaching and learning. The premises have many strong features such as the spacious and attractive grounds. They are well maintained and

most facilities and resources are used to best advantage, although the range of library texts is currently too limited to support learning fully.

- 2.7 Strong links exist between the school and parents, right from the start in the EYFS, and these are successfully promoted throughout the school. This assists the school in providing a caring, tolerant and supportive community to which all contribute, as noted in the aims. Parents of pupils and prospective pupils are provided with relevant information. Parents are made aware of the complaints procedure and are encouraged to talk to staff about any concerns. Records show that complaints are dealt with promptly. Parents are welcomed into school for concerts, plays and sporting fixtures. In addition, parents can 'drop in' in the mornings to talk with any member of staff. About a third of parents responded to the parental questionnaire. The vast majority of parents are strongly supportive of the school and all that it does, especially the quality of education and care provided. A very few parents indicated concern over lack of provision for the more able, but inspectors found due attention is given to all abilities within the school, as evidenced by the examination results.

### **3. MAIN SCHOOL: ACTION POINTS**

#### **(a) Compliance with regulatory requirements**

(The range of the Independent School Standards Regulations is given in the Preface)

- 3.1 The school meets all the requirements of the Independent School Standards Regulations 2003 as subsequently amended, with the exception of those indicated below.

Under Standard 3 (Welfare, health and safety) it must:

- ensure that all statutory Criminal Records Bureau checks are carried out before appointment [Regulation 3.(2)(b) and Regulation 4.(2)(b)].

Under Standard 4 (The suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors) it must:

- ensure that all required checks including medical fitness and previous employment history, are carried out prior to appointment [Regulation 4.(2)(a)]; and
- ensure that all statutory Criminal Records Bureau checks are carried out before appointment [Regulation 4.(2)(b) and Regulation 3.(2)(b)].

#### **(b) Recommended action**

- 3.2 The school is advised to make the following improvements:

1. improve the rigour with which governors carry out their responsibilities to ensure statutory requirements are met;
2. improve development planning to include well defined, clearly costed priorities; and
3. improve the effectiveness of the library and the use of ICT to support learning across a range of subjects.

#### **4. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE (EYFS)**

- 4.1 The 29 EYFS children aged between two and five years are accommodated in the New Steps Foundation Stage situated on the junior school site. There are eight boys and twenty-one girls. Nineteen children attend on a part time basis and ten children are full time. One child is identified as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD). No child is classified as having English as an additional language (EAL).
- 4.2 This setting is satisfactory overall with many good elements. It is successful in achieving its aim for children to be happy and curious with a love of learning that will last them all their lives. It has happy, confident children and the strong support of parents. Children make good progress in their learning, demonstrate outstanding personal development and benefit from knowledgeable, hardworking staff. The youngest children are happy and do well, their all-round development successfully promoted by activities specially planned or adapted to their needs.
- 4.3 Leadership and management are satisfactory overall and many aspects are good. EYFS managers have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the provision and take effective steps to improve it. Staff are focused on helping all children to make good progress in their learning and development and promoting their welfare. At the time of the inspection not all the required checks for safeguarding children had been carried out; however, the school took immediate action to rectify this omission. All other policies, procedures and practice are detailed and effective and risk assessments are well devised. In the pre-inspection questionnaire, the parents expressed appreciation of their children's good progress and of the nurturing, care and support their children receive. Strong links with external agencies, including the local authority, successfully promote children's health, learning and well-being.
- 4.4 The quality of the provision is good. The adults' good knowledge and understanding of the EYFS framework means they are confident in helping children learn appropriately both in and out of doors. Children are encouraged to be creative and to develop independence. An effective balance is maintained between adult-led and self initiated activities. The stimulating outdoor environment, gives children first hand contact with the weather, seasons and the natural world. It is used effectively to offer children freedom to explore, use their senses, and be physically active and exuberant. Planning makes effective use of the EYFS guidance, and staff are clear about long and medium term plans. Thorough initial and ongoing assessment identifies what children can do and helps adults to match activities to the full range of children's needs. However, written short term planning does not record individual children's 'next steps' in their learning.
- 4.5 Outcomes for children are good overall and children's personal development is outstanding. Relationships are very strong, and children display high levels of confidence, independence, curiosity and concentration. They demonstrate positive behaviour, listening carefully to adult guidance, taking turns and sharing toys and equipment sensibly. Children enter Nursery with ability on average in line with age related expectations, with some variance either side. By the end of the EYFS most children demonstrate progress above national standards as evident in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile, moderated by the local authority. Children have good literacy and numeracy skills and talk about their learning activities with

enthusiasm and clarity of expression. They have well-developed self-help skills, for example knowing why they must wash their hands and how to make healthy choices about what they eat and drink sensibly. Children respond well to praise and encouragement and are happy in the setting deriving much pleasure from their learning.

## **5. EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE: ACTION POINTS**

### **(a) Compliance with the Early Years Foundation Stage requirements**

- 5.1 In order to comply with the welfare requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage, the school must:
- obtain an enhanced Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) disclosure in respect of every person aged sixteen or over:
    - who works directly with the children;
    - who lives on the premises on which the childcare is provided;
    - who works on the premises on which the childcare is provided.
- 5.2 In order to meet the requirements of the Childcare Act 2006, those who provide the registered provision for children under three must:
- obtain an enhanced Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) disclosure in respect of every person aged sixteen or over:
    - who works directly with the children;
    - who lives on the premises on which the childcare is provided;
    - who works on the premises on which the childcare is provided.

### **Complaints since the last inspection**

- 5.3 Since the last inspection there have been no complaints made to Ofsted that required any action to meet national requirements.

### **(b) Recommended action**

- 5.4 The Early Years Foundation Stage setting should take the following action to improve:
1. record individual children's 'next steps' in short term planning.

## **INSPECTION EVIDENCE**

The inspectors observed lessons, conducted formal interviews with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with senior members of staff and with the chair of governors/the proprietor/a governors' representative/governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended registration sessions and assemblies. Inspectors visited boarding houses. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined regulatory documentation made available by the school.

### **Inspectors**

Mrs Ruth McFarlane	Reporting inspector
Mrs Marilyn Fenn	Junior Team Inspector (Head, IAPS)
Ms Barbara Brown	Senior Team Inspector
Mrs Felicity Lawson	Early Years Lead Inspector

## INTERIM INSPECTION – FINAL REMARKS

Please note that the regulatory issues referred to in the report and in the final recommendations, relate specifically to the fact that, as a result of an administrative error, in the year January to December 2009 our Australian GAP year students had no UK CRB checks in place at the time of the inspection. The school had received Australian police reports – by far the most meaningful form of safeguarding check in this context - and we had detailed reports and letters of good conduct from the Australian college. Polam Hall has benefited from the services of 17 or 18 year old girls from Daramalan College for many years.

Importantly, UK CRB checking for overseas students is a technicality since it cannot show anything of value. CRB checks show criminal offences committed in the UK; our GAP year girls came to us as school leavers and had never previously been in the UK.

The failure on this technicality constitutes what is known as a ‘limiting judgement’, and places a ceiling of ‘Satisfactory’ on the Governance and Leadership grades and on the overall judgement for the Early Years setting.

We now have the required checks in place for **all** members of our staff, including those from overseas.