



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

**Focused Compliance and Educational Quality Inspection Report
For Schools with Residential Provision**

Mowden Hall School

November 2022

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School's Details

School	Mowden Hall School			
DfE number	929/6005			
Registered charity number	309639			
Address	Mowden Hall School Newton Stocksfield Northumberland NE43 7TP			
Telephone number	01661 842147			
Email address	info@mowdenhallpst.org			
Headteacher	Mrs Kate Martin			
Proprietor	The Prep Schools Trust			
Age range	3 to 13			
Number of pupils on roll	196			
	Day pupils	120	Boarders	76
	EYFS	36	Juniors	110
	Seniors	50		
Inspection dates	22 to 24 November 2022			

1. Background Information

About the school

- 1.1 Mowden Hall School is a co-educational independent day and boarding school founded in 1935. In 2007 the school became part of the Prep Schools Trust, administered by a board of trustees.
- 1.2 The school is comprised of three sections: An Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) for children aged from three to five years, a pre-preparatory section for those in Years 1 and 2 and a preparatory school for those in Years 3 to 8. The school has one boarding house situated on campus for pupils aged 8 to 13 years.
- 1.3 The current headteacher took up her position in September 2020. The senior leadership of the school was restructured in 2020.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.4 The school aspires to provide a first-class education, in which every child is given the opportunity to achieve their potential within a broad range of academic, cultural and sporting pursuits. The school seeks to provide high ideals, excellent pastoral care and traditional family values to help Mowdenians grow up happily and honourably, with self-respect, confidence and a strong sense of responsibility and consideration for others and the wider community. The school strives to create a diverse and inclusive learning environment so that high quality learning and teaching leads to positive experiences and outcomes for pupils.

About the pupils

- 1.5 Nationally standardised tests indicate that the ability of the pupils is broadly average compared to those taking the same tests nationally. The school has identified 28 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), including dyslexia, dyspraxia and other conditions. Of these, 15 pupils receive specialist support. Two pupils have an educational, health and care (EHC) plan. Three pupils speak English as an additional language (EAL) and receive additional support for their English. Data used by the school has identified a number of pupils as being the most able in the school's population, and the curriculum is modified for them.

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, including the National Minimum Standards for Boarding ('boarding NMS'), where applicable. 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, and for registered settings the full range of the Early Years Foundation Stage provisions is considered. 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, including the boarding NMS. 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, National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools, 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, the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools 2022, 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 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 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. Boarders have access to a suitable programme of activities.
- 2.4 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.
- 2.5 The standards relating to the quality of education [paragraphs 1–4] are met.**

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

- 2.6 Principles and values are actively promoted which facilitate the personal development of pupils as responsible, tolerant, law-abiding citizens. Boarders' views are actively encouraged, and their opinions and concerns are appropriately considered by staff. Boarders are supported to develop good relationships with fellow pupils and staff which are based on mutual trust and respect. Any prefect system operating in the school is suitably managed.
- 2.7 The standard relating to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development [paragraph 5] and NMS 13, 17 and 21 are met.**

PART 3 – Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 2.8 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.
- 2.9 An appropriate induction process for pupils new to boarding is implemented, and suitable provision is made for boarders' medical and health care, their food and drink and for managing boarders' laundry and possessions. Boarders have suitable contact with friends and family. Boarding staff are appropriately trained and deployed.
- 2.10 The standards relating to welfare, health and safety [paragraphs 6–16], the requirement of Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010, the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996, and NMS 3, 5–12, 15, 16 and 20 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. Visitors to boarding accommodation are appropriately supervised and the school's arrangements for guardianship are suitably managed.
- 2.12 **The standards relating to the suitability of those in contact with pupils at the school [paragraphs 17–21] and NMS 19 and 22 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. Boarding accommodation is adequate for the needs of all boarders, and safeguards and promotes their welfare.
- 2.14 **The standards relating to the premises and accommodation [paragraphs 22–31] and NMS 4, 7 and 23 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. A suitable statement of boarding principles and practice is published by the school.
- 2.16 **The standard relating to the provision of information [paragraph 32] and NMS 1 are 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, and identifying those relating to the boarding provision.
- 2.18 **The standard relating to the handling of complaints [paragraph 33] and NMS 14 are 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. Appropriate leadership and management of boarding ensure that the required policies and records are maintained and effectively monitored.
- 2.20 **The standard relating to leadership and management of the school [paragraph 34] and NMS 2 are 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.

Key findings

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

- Pupils are highly articulate and speak with confidence.
- Pupils display very high levels of proficiency in using information and communication technology (ICT) across their curriculum.
- Pupils demonstrate highly developed critical analysis skills.
- Pupils achieve very successfully across a range of interests and pursuits.

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

- Pupils exhibit excellent levels of self-confidence.
- Pupils show excellent levels of spiritual understanding by readily engaging in debates on moral and ethical issues.
- Pupils make an excellent contribution to their school community, actively participating in a range of roles and committees.
- Pupils demonstrate high moral values and excellent behaviour is the norm.

Recommendation

3.3 The school is advised to make the following improvements.

- Enable pupils to improve the neatness and fluency of their handwriting.
- Strengthen pupils' ability to pursue their own research interests.

The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements

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

3.5 Pupils display excellent knowledge, skills and understanding across their broad curriculum. For example, during a personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) lesson, children in the EYFS demonstrated an excellent knowledge of family dynamics. They explored personal photographs and were able to explain the differences in family structures that they could see between them. Year 2 pupils exhibited excellent use of texture in their artwork whilst working on African masks. They also showed a mature approach to the design and evaluation of their product. Year 7 pupils demonstrated an excellent range of scientific vocabulary in their science lesson on parts of a plant. Older pupils display a particularly strong understanding of French which is developed during a visit to a residential

setting in France. Pupils' acquisition of knowledge is aided by well-planned lessons and the secure subject knowledge provided by staff. The school meets its aim of every child being given the opportunity to achieve his or her potential within a broad range of academic, cultural and sporting pursuits.

- 3.6 Pupils' attitudes are excellent. Pupils actively engage in lessons and have a positive attitude towards learning. They work highly effectively in pairs, groups or individually. For example, in a Year 6 science lesson to separate sand and water, pupils exhibited excellent collaborative skills, sharing the tasks equally and negotiating how to proceed. Children in the EYFS undertook excellent collaborative work as they worked as a group to place objects in a frame to see if there were five. Boarders exhibit a strong work ethic and report that, whilst help is always available, they are encouraged to use a range of sources to support their learning.
- 3.7 Pupils display excellent numeracy skills in their mathematics lessons and across the curriculum. For example, Year 2 pupils exhibited a thorough grasp of place value and more able pupils showed advanced skills whilst tackling problem solving activities. Older pupils demonstrated a very strong grasp of algebraic language whilst using bar models to simplify expressions and solve problems. Pupils' progress is aided by the provision by staff of differing levels of challenge for their classes and the provision by the school's leadership of high-quality resources. This development begins with the youngest pupils where, for example, nursery children could count forwards and backwards, using their hands to show how much food the hungry caterpillar ate within their story. They used numerical terminology such as 'more than' and 'less than', to describe the difference eaten each day. Pupils make good use of their numeracy skills in other subjects. For example, in science, Year 3 pupils carefully measured soil samples. In music, younger pupils were able to calculate the beats required to complete their musical composition using allocated note sounds.
- 3.8 Pupils demonstrate excellent study skills. Almost all parents who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire agreed that the school equips their child with the team working, collaborative and research skills they will need in later life. As an example, Year 7 pupils showed excellent deductive skills when they combined their historical and Latin knowledge to analyse the Bayeux tapestry to sequence the events of 1066. Year 1 pupils displayed maturity and excellent analytical skills as they partnered up to discuss their artwork, completed in the style of Kandinsky to critically reflect upon its effectiveness. Pupils are able to draw information from various sources as needed, including dictionaries, thesauruses and ICT based search engines. They also draw upon prior learning. For example, in a Year 5 science lesson, pupils used their prior knowledge about properties of gases, to hypothesize about whether or not some materials and objects could reverse states, when heated or mixed with other objects.
- 3.9 Pupils show excellent verbal communication skills across the curriculum. In their form time, Year 8 pupils spoke on a range of current affairs with confidence and clarity whilst their peers listened intently. Early years children utilised excellent verbal explanations relating to capacity as they created 'potions' using funnels and bottles. Younger children show a developing cursive handwriting style and many display good spelling knowledge and sentence structures. The work of many older pupils showed good examples of extended writing including the use of adventurous vocabulary. Whilst many examples were seen of excellent use of language and description in pupils' writing, pupils' note-taking skills are inconsistent. Many older pupils exhibit under-developed fluency and legibility in handwriting. Pupils demonstrate very well-developed reading skills which benefit from many opportunities to read aloud in public. These range from services at St. James's Church, at Hexham Abbey and the annual reading competition. A number of pupils enhance their reading and speaking skills by undertaking additional tuition in the LAMDA scheme.
- 3.10 Pupils are fluent and competent users of ICT. Older pupils show effective use of their personal devices and in discussion explained how they were used to reinforce mathematics skills or language learning in French and Latin. Pupils readily create presentations and documents and access a variety of programmes in other subjects. They confidently navigate their way around the school's ICT intranet

to locate work and resources provided by staff. A Year 6 group was observed confidently manipulating a computer aided design package to build a house on screen. However, much of the work observed was teacher-guided and opportunities for independent open-ended pupil projects or research are fewer. This restricts pupils' opportunities to satisfy their wider intellectual curiosity.

- 3.11 Pupils achieve good examination results and most display excellent progress. Those with EAL achieve in line with their peers and pupils with SEND frequently make rapid progress. Pupils' progress in reading is particularly marked due to the school's adoption of a focused reading initiative including dedicated reading time each day. Boarders achieve well by making good use of their time outside lessons and school facilities such as the ICT rooms. In the questionnaire, an overwhelming majority of parents agreed that the boarding experience has helped their child's progress. In discussions with inspectors, pupils attributed their progress to the helpful feedback and marking given by their teachers. Discussions with staff indicate that pupil progress is supported through regular meetings between teachers and senior leaders at which pupil assessment data and pastoral matters are discussed.
- 3.12 The wider achievements of the pupils are excellent. A significant number of senior pupils earn scholarships for their chosen secondary school, across a range of disciplines. In sport, the senior hockey team were recently county champions, and the equestrian team were placed third in the show jumping national championships (northern region). Pupils have been selected for county representation in a wide range of outdoor sports. A number of pupils were finalists in a recent BBC '500 words' writing competition. Pupils succeed in the performing arts with many merits and distinctions awarded for music examinations and LAMDA performances. Pupils report that the school recognises and celebrates achievement at all levels.

The quality of the pupils' personal development

- 3.13 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 3.14 Pupils demonstrate excellent self-understanding. They exhibit high levels of self-confidence and self-discipline. During interviews with inspectors, pupils of various ages, including boarders, were highly confident to offer and justify their ideas. Most parents who responded to the questionnaire agreed that the school helps their child to be confident and independent. Almost all parents of boarders who responded agreed that the boarding experience has supported their child's personal development, and this was echoed in discussion with pupils who board. Pupils show maturity as they are encouraged to consider their learning by the regular completion of self-reflection sheets based upon the success criteria of the lesson. In an EYFS mathematics lesson, children showed that they do not fear making mistakes and exhibited the confidence to try new things. During their form session, Year 8 pupils demonstrated excellent self-reflection skills when they used a quiz to identify the type of person they currently are and want to be in the future, along with how they might make a positive impact on society.
- 3.15 Pupils display an excellent moral understanding and behave very well towards others. Pupils begin to understand the importance of school rules in the early years. For example, a pre-prep group showed an excellent grasp of actions and consequences in their written work, understanding how to respond in various scenarios about behaviour and what might happen if their behaviour or actions were not appropriate. Year 3 pupils demonstrated high moral values as they presented ideas to their peers on issues that they would be prepared to stand up for. These included the issue of rubbish in our oceans or supporting a friend in need. Boarders offered inspectors a series of anecdotes to reveal an excellent understanding of the difference between right and wrong and how they learn to accept responsibility for their own behaviour, and the ramifications for the community around them. During discussions, pupils felt that the school's rewards system and the 'restorative' nature of sanctions was effective in motivating them to make good decisions about their own behaviour.

- 3.16 Pupils display excellent levels of social development and work highly effectively with others across a range of activities. A very large majority of parents who responded to the questionnaire said that the school helps their child to develop strong teamwork and social skills. Pupils work highly successfully across the age range. Whether this be boarders, pulling together in a dormitory group to try to win the 'Nightscore' competition for the best-behaved bedroom, or in house activities such as house singing. Development of these skills begins with the youngest pupils, as seen at playtime when groups tidied away equipment with enthusiasm and resolve to achieve their shared purpose. In their drama lesson, Year 5 pupils showed a strong awareness that productions are a collaborative undertaking. They showed a mature comprehension that their presence on stage was not just about themselves but how it also affects other actors and the audience's enjoyment.
- 3.17 Pupils make an excellent contribution to others, the school and the wider community. In discussion with inspectors, pupils described how they value the opportunities for community service such as becoming part of the school council or taking on other positions of responsibility. These include roles in school leadership, house leadership and supporting other pupils through work in the library or aspects of music. Senior pupils show a particularly well-developed capacity for supporting others. For example, a group meets regularly with the school's deputy head to discuss issues of common interest such as playground behaviour or the scheduling of activities, and to help to formulate aspects of policy. Older pupils were seen offering excellent support to their younger peers at lunchtime, both with the practicalities of helping to serve food, and with general advice about school life. Pupils regularly think of others and have raised significant funds for local charities with several events being initiated by the pupils themselves. Boarders showed an excellent commitment to the local community as they described collecting donations for the local foodbank and baking cakes to sell for those less fortunate than themselves. In recent years, pupils have helped internationally by raising money to improve both the fabric and fixtures of a Kenyan school. Pupils were also recently awarded a Gold Award by the Woodland Trust for their involvement in eco-activities including recycling, tree planting, being active in their woodland areas and reducing carbon emissions.
- 3.18 Pupils exhibit a high respect for diversity and show well developed cultural understanding. The work of pupils across the age range shows a developed understanding of the world's main religions. In discussion with inspectors, pupils demonstrated a comprehensive understanding of topics concerning respect for others, as studied in their PSHE curriculum. For example, in form times, pupils were observed enthusiastically engaging in a discussion about Malala and the need to stand up for what you believe. In the questionnaire, all parents agreed that the school actively promotes the values of democracy, respect and tolerance of other people. Younger pupils exhibited a good understanding of the meaning of Remembrance Day in their written work. In a PSHE lesson, older pupils showed an excellent understanding of the harmful consequences of stereotyping and how it could be combatted. Boarding pupils take a keen interest in the background of their peers who may be from other parts of the world or traditions. All pupils gain a good understanding of different cultures through their studies of different parts of the world. All pupils in Year 7 spend half a term living in France which allows the pupils to fully immerse themselves in a different culture and language. The school meets its aim to create a diverse and inclusive learning environment leading to positive experiences and outcomes for pupils.
- 3.19 Pupils acquire an excellent spiritual understanding and readily discuss the non-material aspects of life. For example, in a religion, philosophy and ethics (RPE) lesson, Year 4 pupils debated vigorously the question of whether humans were more important than animals. Pupils' development in this area is enhanced by the provision of regular philosophical and ethical questions posed in the RPE curriculum, instigated by the school's leadership. Boarders showed an excellent capacity for appreciating the non-material aspects of their life as they discussed how they enjoy the school's extensive grounds and being involved with musical groups such as choir or orchestra. They described free time as an opportunity to reflect upon nature and develop a strong sense of belonging to a community and saw the boarding house as a 'home from home'.

- 3.20 Pupils exhibit good decision-making skills. For example, during a class debate, Year 4 pupils decided and expressed their opinions about whether schools should have a uniform and others decided, after the debate, whether the opinions were valid. Many make a valuable contribution to school council or other committees. Such pupil groups have made constructive suggestions to the school leadership team which include a wider variety of Friday afternoon activities, speeding up the lunch process, and the provision of a room for a proposed club. Suggestions have also been made to enhance the school lunch menus. Those who board actively contribute to decisions about the daily life of the boarding house. They understand very well the impact of their decisions, as shown in the results of the popular 'decorate the dorm' initiative.
- 3.21 Pupils have an excellent knowledge of how to keep themselves safe and healthy. Year 3 pupils demonstrated a thorough knowledge of the safety rules in the swimming pool, knowing, for example where it was not safe to dive. In discussion with inspectors, pupils displayed excellent knowledge about how to stay safe online. Older pupils were well aware of some of the dangers of using social media. Pupils displayed a thorough understanding that they could talk to the adults in their lives if they felt threatened or worried. They understood well to whom they could talk in school and boarders knew the identity of the school's independent person. The overwhelming majority of parents who responded to the questionnaire agreed that the school encourages their child to adopt a healthy lifestyle and, in their questionnaire, almost all pupils echoed that the school encourages them to be healthy. At lunch, pupils exhibited a highly informed awareness of the role nutrition plays in their health as they selected foods using a colour coded menu to highlight different food groups.

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 a member of the Trustees, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended form meetings. Inspectors visited the boarding house and 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 Robert Lilley	Reporting inspector
Mr Jonathan Runswick-Cole	Compliance team inspector (Compliance officer, HMC school)
Mrs Laura Turner	Team inspector (Head, IAPS school)
Mrs Jean Hambley	Team inspector for boarding (Deputy head, ISA school)