



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

Focused Compliance and Educational Quality Inspection Reports

UCS Pre-Prep

November 2019



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School's Details

School	UCS Pre-Prep			
DfE number	202/6393			
Registered charity number	1098657			
Address	36 College Crescent London NW3 5LF			
Telephone number	020 7722 4433			
Email address	pre-prep@ucs.org.uk			
Headmistress	Dr Zoe Dunn			
Chair of governors	Mr Simon Lewis			
Age range	4 to 7			
Number of pupils on roll	98			
	EYFS	32	Infants	66
Inspection dates	5 to 7 November 2019			

1. Background Information

About the school

- 1.1 UCS Pre-Prep, formerly Phoenix School, was founded in 1994 as a nursery with a small primary section. The school became part of the University College Foundation in 2002. In September 2016, the UCS Council decided to change the name of Phoenix School to UCS Pre-Prep and to transform the school from a co-educational school for pupils aged three to seven years, to a school for male pupils aged four to seven years.
- 1.2 The school is one of three UCS schools, which are governed jointly by a council of 20 members. The school is located in a converted house and uses additional facilities at the junior branch, senior school and college playing fields to teach information and communication technology, library, swimming, theatre, outdoor learning and physical education.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.3 UCS Pre-Prep fully supports the aims and ethos of the whole UCS Foundation: intellectual curiosity and independence of mind are developed, self-discovery and self-expression are fostered, and learning co-operatively and collaboratively is highly valued. Pupils are encouraged to think creatively, explore their environment and problem-solve.

About the pupils

- 1.4 Pupils come from a range of professional backgrounds. Families represent a wide range of cultural and religious diversity, from all over London. Nationally standardised test data provided by the school indicate that the ability of the pupils is above average. No pupil in the school has an education, health and care (EHC) plan. The school has identified seven pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), which include dyslexia, dyspraxia and hypermobility, four of whom receive additional specialist help. English is an additional language (EAL) for 33 pupils, whose needs are supported by their classroom teachers and EAL Intervention teacher. Data used by the school have identified two pupils as being the more able in the school's population, and the curriculum is modified for them and for three other pupils because of their special talents in sport, art and music.

2. Regulatory Compliance Inspection

Preface

The registration authority for independent schools is the Department for Education (DfE), which directs inspection according to a specified frequency or at any time where the DfE has particular concerns about a school. The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is the body approved by the Secretary of State for the purpose of inspecting schools which are, or whose heads are, in membership of the associations which form the Independent Schools Council (ISC) and reporting on the extent to which they meet the Independent School Standards ('the standards') in the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014. Accordingly, inspection records whether the school meets each of these standards, which are arranged in eight Parts, each of which is divided into separate paragraphs. The inspection of schools that have early years settings not requiring registration similarly records whether the school complies with key provisions of the Early Years Foundation Stage statutory framework. Additionally, the inspection reports 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. It comments on the progress made by the school in meeting the compliance action points set out in the school's most recent statutory inspection.

All association independent schools will have an inspection within three years from April 2016, in accordance with the Framework and DfE requirements. The inspection may be of COMPLIANCE ONLY or a combined inspection of EDUCATIONAL QUALITY AND COMPLIANCE depending on a number of factors, including findings from their most recent inspection. Schools judged not to meet the standards may also be subject to a progress monitoring visit before their next routine inspection. The progress monitoring visit will judge whether the school has taken the necessary action to meet any un-met standards identified at their previous inspection.

The inspection was 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 report of which appears later in this document. The 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 regulations and standards have been inspected in detail. These are the regulations on safeguarding; measures to guard against bullying; arrangements for pupils' health and safety, arrangements to check the suitability of staff; the provision of information to parents; 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 full regulations 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 The school uses its own framework to determine attainment, instead of the national framework.
- 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.
- 2.4 **The standards relating to the quality of education [paragraphs 1–4] are met.**

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

- 2.5 Principles and values are actively promoted which facilitate the personal development of pupils as responsible, tolerant, law-abiding citizens.
- 2.6 **The standard relating to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development [paragraph 5] is met.**

PART 3 – Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 2.7 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.
- 2.8 **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

- 2.9 The school makes appropriate checks to ensure the suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors, and a register is kept as required.
- 2.10 **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

- 2.11 Suitable toilet and changing facilities, and showering facilities where required by the standard, and appropriate accommodation for pupils' medical 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.
- 2.12 **The standards relating to the premises and accommodation [paragraphs 22–31] are met.**

PART 6 – Provision of information

2.13 A range of information is variously 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. They also include 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.

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

PART 7 – Manner in which complaints are handled

2.15 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.

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

PART 8 – Quality of leadership in and management of schools

2.17 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.

2.18 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.

Since the school was last inspected, the framework for inspection has changed. The current inspection framework uses different criteria and arrangements for grading from those used in previous inspection frameworks. The judgements made on this inspection are, therefore, not directly comparable to judgements made on previous inspections.

All independent schools are required to meet the requirements of the Independent School Standards. However, different inspectorates apply different frameworks that are suited to the different types of schools they inspect. The ISI terminology reflects quality judgements that are at least equivalent to those used by the national inspectorate, Ofsted. ISI reports do not provide a single overarching judgement for the school but instead give a clear judgement about key outcomes for pupils and information on the quality of the school's work.

The headline judgements must include 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 make rapid progress from their varied starting points due to the high expectations of staff, the broad curriculum and the extensive range of extra-curricular activities.
- Pupils display outstanding communication skills both orally and in their written work, and in the open and respectful manner in which they listen to others.
- Pupils have an excellent understanding of how they learn, the progress they are making, and what they need to do to improve.
- Pupils show a mature attitude towards their learning and demonstrate independence in their thinking and approach to lessons.

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

- Pupils exhibit high levels of resilience and perseverance, seeing mistakes as something to be overcome on the journey to success.
- Pupils have a well-established sense of right and wrong supported by a clear framework for understanding behaviour expectations.
- Pupils frequently demonstrate high levels of independence and responsibility in lessons, and within the wider school community.
- Pupils develop excellent social and collaborative skills in an atmosphere of mutual support and teaching strategies that succeed in providing a positive model of learning attitudes.

Recommendation

3.3 In the context of the excellent outcomes, the school might wish to consider making the following improvement:

- Ensure pupils make as much progress in all lessons, as they do in the best, through more consistent expectations for behaviour in class.

The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements

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

3.5 In the EYFS, children make an excellent start to their education. They make rapid progress from their different starting points so all children, including those with SEN or EAL, reach or exceed expected levels of development for their age. Pupils continue to make very strong progress at all stages due to the high expectations of staff, the broad curriculum and the extensive range of extra-curricular activities. As a result, all pupils progress to the selective junior branch of UCS or gain entry to other equally selective junior schools. The school does not take part in National Curriculum tests but evidence from lesson observations, scrutiny of pupils' books and the school's own assessment data shows attainment to be above average in relation to national age-related expectations. All pupils, including those with SEND or EAL make good progress due to the highly effective lesson planning that ensures every pupil receives appropriate levels of support and challenge. Every parent who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire agreed that the school enables pupils to learn and make good progress.

- 3.6 Children of all abilities, including those identified as EAL, SEND or more able, make excellent progress both academically and socially, compared to that typically expected for their ages. Excellent tracking of pupils, both formally and informally ensures early identification of needs across the range of pupils, so that suitable support can be put in place to help enable excellent progress. Pupils are very clear about the next steps in their learning, either from target setting or feedback from teachers, and they are keen to improve their work and reach their goals. Pupils demonstrate high levels of subject knowledge: for example, in Year 2 pupils talked confidently about the main parts of the brain and their function, while the pupils in Year 1 were able to use terms such as ‘digraph’ during a literacy lesson. In the majority of lessons, teachers use precise vocabulary and detailed demonstrations to support children’s knowledge, skills and understanding. Across the school the teachers’ comprehensive subject knowledge promotes progress very well.
- 3.7 Pupils display outstanding communication skills, both orally and in their written work. They are extremely articulate and show considerable maturity in their discussions with both adults and their peers. In the EYFS children retell familiar stories through different media, through role play, using information and communications technology (ICT) to add characters’ voices to an animated film, or by ordering and speaking to picture cards. They communicate highly effectively with one another and confidently with their teachers, asking questions to further their learning well. Older pupils eloquently and fluently reviewed the story they had been working on, making creative suggestions for improvement. Listening skills are well developed as pupils listen attentively and openly to ideas from others. In Year 2 pupils responded positively to the high expectations of staff, as they suggested synonyms, analogies and antonyms in response to word puzzles.
- 3.8 Pupils’ numeracy skills are excellent, and they demonstrate a strong grasp of mathematical concepts. In the EYFS, children are provided with firm foundations in numeracy and quickly develop confidence to use skills in a variety of circumstances. They identified numbers up to 100 around them during a number hunt and are highly adept at estimating quantities. Pupils explain mathematical processes accurately and with appropriate vocabulary. They work independently and conscientiously, often setting their own challenges. Pupils recognise the value of mistakes as learning opportunities, effectively analysing what went wrong and identifying ways to improve.
- 3.9 Pupils from the EYFS onwards are highly confident with ICT, which they use very effectively to support their learning across all areas of the curriculum, due to the availability of excellent resources and weekly ICT lessons. In the EYFS, children spontaneously used digital technology to record voices for an animated version of a familiar story. Older pupils work independently to use a range of digital applications, programmes and hardware to both complete and evaluate their work in mathematics, literacy and the wider curriculum. They are highly adaptable, moving without hesitation from tablets, to computer to interactive whiteboard with ease. Pupils also exhibited a good understanding of basic coding as they programmed a robotic arm to perform simple actions.
- 3.10 Throughout the school, pupils have an excellent understanding of how they learn, developed through the school’s very popular dinosaur characters, such as ‘mistakosaurus’, and ‘tryatops’, that represent trying, learning from mistakes, thinking and asking. Pupils confidently discussed how they can solve a mathematical problem before asking for help from the teacher and they exhibited strongly developed analytical skills as they compare an original piece of writing with an ‘improved’ version, highlighting the improvements and identifying what could still be added to improve it further. Pupils demonstrate even greater reflection and analysis in lessons where staff consistently use high-order questioning. Pupils reflect upon their own performance, aided by constructive verbal and written feedback from their teachers. Pupils make excellent choices when selecting from the extensive, high quality resources to help them complete a task. In Year 2, pupils used dictionaries independently to define unfamiliar words, while in Year 1 pupils worked collaboratively with ICT to complete a task.

- 3.11 Pupils have significant success for their age in a wide range of activities, including taekwondo, chess, singing, art, dance and gymnastics. Achievements of all kinds are strongly encouraged through the extensive extra-curricular programme and a strong emphasis on creativity throughout the school. Pupils' musical abilities are fostered very effectively by the many opportunities provided to learn how to play a musical instrument. Most pupils gain a place at the selective Junior Branch of UCS, competing in the assessment at the age of seven with external candidates. Others have gained places at highly selective independent and maintained schools throughout London.
- 3.12 In most lessons, pupils are fully engaged and enthusiastic, responding quickly to instructions so that full use is made of available time. They enjoy the many opportunities to work both independently and collaboratively in groups and in pairs. This is evident from an early stage, where children in the EYFS listen carefully and respond to one another's ideas, contributing to their high level of attainment and progress. Occasionally, when lessons are slower paced, pupils listen less well to others and make less rapid progress. Pupils show a mature attitude towards their learning and demonstrate independence in their thinking and approach to lessons. In interviews during the inspection, pupils displayed immense pride in their work.

The quality of the pupils' personal development

- 3.13 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 3.14 Pupils have a strong sense of their own strengths and what they need to do to improve in their learning. They exhibit high levels of resilience and perseverance, seeing mistakes as something to be overcome. Pupils are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning and to be involved, as far as possible, in reviewing their work, reflecting on how they learn and identifying what helps them to learn. Teachers regularly discuss work with pupils in conjunction with marking and further encourage pupils to describe, assess and evaluate their learning needs. As a result, pupils feel a strong sense of ownership of own targets for improvement. They are proud of their school, taking responsibility for their learning beyond age-appropriate levels and want to do their best. In a small minority of lessons, pupils' enthusiasm in class results in them interrupting each other and needing to be regularly reminded to listen. Pupils are very well prepared for the next stage of their education and see tests and exams as a challenge to be overcome.
- 3.15 Across the school, pupils make appropriate choices about their learning, use of resources and behaviour. From choosing tools in the allotment store at the woodland classroom, to selecting the best suggestion from a pool of ideas put forward by a group working on a collaborative art project, the pupils frequently take the lead in lessons. Outside of the classroom, too, pupils have a highly valued influence on decisions that impact different aspects of the school. In Year 2, pupils elect members of the school council, who have been instrumental in the design of the playground. The pupil librarians choose books for each classroom after canvassing ideas from each group. Staff listen carefully to pupils' ideas, ensuring that every pupil feels heard.
- 3.16 Pupils show great sensitivity in their reflections on the non-material aspects of life. In the EYFS children expressed a sense of wonder as they explored a big pile of foam, enjoying the feel of it on their faces. Others listened carefully to calming music in an art lesson. Throughout the school pupils engage fully in mindfulness, yoga activities and techniques to focus on the immediate world around them. Sessions in the woodland classroom invariably start with a minute of silence to reflect on nature. In art lessons, the pupils discuss how paintings and other works of art make them feel, for example, reflecting on the sacrifice of others and considering different artistic representations of the poppy in preparation for Armistice Day. The school's spiritual, moral, social and cultural learning is embedded into the daily life, in line with the school's aims and ethos of tolerance, intellectual curiosity and liberal scholarship, and respect for others. Pupils happily share important moments from their lives as they write notes for the 'joyful jar' and add items to their 'special box', a celebration of what makes them an individual.

- 3.17 Children have a well-established sense of right and wrong, developed through a consistently implemented programme of rewards and, on the rare occasion they are needed, sanctions. Staff all use the same language when reflecting on behaviour and consequences, giving the pupils a clear framework for understanding behaviour expectations. Pupils contribute to drawing up classroom rules and appreciate the role these play in maintaining a peaceful learning environment. Very occasionally, however, chatter is allowed to continue for too long, slowing the pace of learning. Pupils fully understand the collective responsibility they have for upholding golden rules and take great pride in earning points for their house. They take roles of responsibility, such as house captain, well-being champion or playground pal, very seriously.
- 3.18 Pupils develop excellent social and collaborative skills as they are frequently encouraged to work in pairs or small groups in most lessons. 'Learning partners' change regularly to encourage wider friendships and new opportunities. In the EYFS highly effective collaboration and listening skills help children to share resources and build on one another's ideas. They respond quickly to instructions and help spontaneously to clear up at the end of an activity. During art lessons, pupils of all ages form 'apron lines' to encourage everyone to help and be helped. Older pupils readily help and support others to solve numeracy problems. This atmosphere of mutual support is a reflection of teaching strategies that aim to provide a positive model of learning attitudes. Pupils are encouraged to ask the 'class expert' (another child who has already mastered a particular concept or skill) to seek guidance on how to correct an error or solve a problem. Playground pals and house buddies further encourage pupils to take care of one another.
- 3.19 Pupils demonstrate considerable awareness and appreciation of their own and other cultures, embodying the school's central aim to promote a sense of community alongside a tolerance of and respect for the individual. Pupils engage in mature discussions on similarities and differences in personal, social and health education (PSHE) lessons and wrote sensitive reinterpretations of Martin Luther King's '*I have a dream*' speech as part of Black History Month. They accept the views of others as they discuss a range of topics in the popular debating club, and exhibit empathy for those less fortunate than themselves as they select and then plan fundraising activities for local, national and international charities. Pupils develop a strong awareness of different family traditions in an environment which, in line with the school's Benthamite foundation, sees diversity as a gateway to intellectual curiosity and independence of mind. In their responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire, parents unanimously agreed that the school actively promotes values of democracy, respect and tolerance of other people.
- 3.20 From the EYFS onwards, pupils have a well-developed understanding of staying safe and keeping healthy. They can explain the importance of washing hands before and cleaning teeth after eating, due to the regular and consistent reinforcement from staff. At lunchtime pupils talk confidently what are healthy foods and how they help the body. They recognised and used words such as vitamins and energy, as they discussed the benefits of healthy eating while making and eating a fruit salad in cooking club.
- 3.21 Pupils are alert to potential hazards in the classroom and staff make excellent use of real examples to highlight the need to take care when moving around the school or using resources. Children demonstrate an understanding of staying safe through drama activities and role-play, reflecting the important lessons they learn in PSHE classes and from visitors such as police and road safety officers. Pupils have a good understanding of e-safety, appropriate to their age and stage of development, developed through discussions in ICT lessons.
- 3.22 Pupils are able to reflect sensitively on their own well-being and that of others, and openly discuss how to ask for help, directly or through the 'worry boxes' in each classroom, if they are unhappy. Well-being champions and playground pals provide valuable support to younger or less confident children. Throughout the school, pupils are confident that staff will listen and respond to any concerns they may have.

- 3.23 Pupils greatly enjoy and benefit from the wide range of physical and sporting activities available to them within the pre-prep and the wider foundation facilities, such as the swimming pool, sports hall and extensive playing fields.

4. Inspection Evidence

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

Inspectors

Mr Chris Manville	Reporting inspector
Mr Jason Gayler	Compliance team inspector (Head of pre-prep, ISA school)
Mrs Amanda Childs	Team inspector (Headteacher, IAPS school)