

Access Information – Schools and educational groups

Overview

Newcastle Castle consists of two buildings and the space in between them. These buildings are the **Black Gate** and the **Castle Keep**.



Black Gate



Castle Keep

The land in between the two buildings is not owned or managed by Newcastle Castle, it is public land. You enter Newcastle Castle by coming to the Black Gate first. If you are part of a school group that has booked a visit led by our staff or guides, you will usually be met outside, under the arch of the Black Gate.

Black Gate

Entrance to Newcastle Castle is via the Black Gate. As you walk through the archway of the gate, there is a metal gate and staircase which leads into the building. The stairs are not steep but are narrow in places. The Black Gate also has a lift. If you walk through the archway and past the staircase, a wooden walkway goes round the side of the building to a wooden lift shaft.

The reception area and gift shop are on the first floor of the Black Gate. There are two toilets on this floor, including one accessible toilet which also has baby changing facilities. There will always be a member of staff on duty here. It is accessible by lift.

The learning room, called The Harbottle Suite, is on the second floor. It has two toilets, including one accessible toilet. This is where school workshops take place and where schools groups usually have their lunch. It is accessible by lift.

The museum room is on the third floor. It is accessible by lift.

The fourth floor of the Black Gate is the office and is for staff only. It is only accessible by a short staircase, not by the lift.

The Castle Site

A typical tour of the Castle will go from the front of the Black Gate, through the archway and over a wooden walkway towards a railway bridge. The wooden walkway has three steps going up onto it behind the Black Gate, next to the medieval prison called the **Heron Pit**.



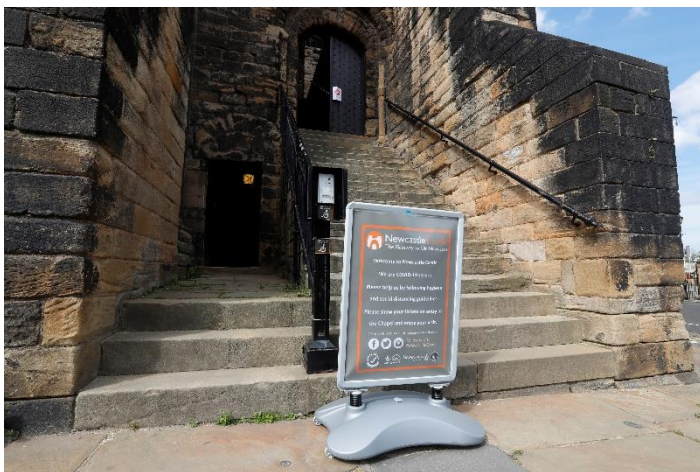
Heron Pit

If anyone in your group is unable to manage the stairs, we will take an alternative route, going back through the Black Gate and walking down St Nicholas Street towards the Castle Keep.

Either way we will walk under the arches of the railway bridge across some cobbled ground to reach the Castle Keep.

As this is public land please be aware of traffic on nearby roads and members of the public.

Castle Keep



Castle Keep Entrance

The Castle Keep is a scheduled ancient monument and is over 800 years old. It does not meet the access standards expected of a modern building – in fact, it was designed mainly to keep people out!

Entrance to the Castle Keep is up a steep stone staircase. There are 34 steps. They are uneven in places and can be slippery when it is wet. There are metal handrails up both sides.

Inside the Keep there are steep, uneven spiral stairs throughout the building. They have metal handrails most of the way up, on one side only.

The light levels are low in some places in the Keep and there are low doorways.

The Keep Roof is flat and open to the air. There is a gutter running round the middle of the roof which could be a

trip hazard. There is a small viewing turret with a very low doorway. Please note that the Keep can seem very dark when coming back inside from the roof onto the spiral stairs. People who are scared of heights may want to stay in the middle of the roof. There is a metal barrier around the outside.

Access within the Keep

The Keep is a difficult building to access for wheelchair users or those with other mobility difficulties who might find the stairs challenging. Ground floor access is available to the lowest chamber of the Keep (which is called the **garrison room, cellar, or gaol**). A member of staff will come downstairs and open the folding wooden door from the inside. There is then ramped access into the gaol. There is a video tour of the rest of the Keep in this room featuring expert commentary and photography. The other chamber on this floor, the **chapel**, is accessed via four stone steps up and four down.

From this floor to the next floor (which is called the **lower hall**) are 29 spiral steps.

To the next floor up, the **great hall**, there are another 38 spiral steps. The great hall is large and open but has several small chambers off to either side. Some of these have uneven floors, low light levels or are access by steps.

From the great hall to the **roof** there are another 69 spiral steps. The roof is accessed by a heavy metal gate.

If a child with a school group is unable to access parts of the Keep due to mobility difficulties or other needs, please let us know in advance so that we can plan alternative activities. Usually we will try to ensure another guide is on duty that day to stay with any children who must stop at any point during the tour of the Keep and lead other activities with them. We will endeavour to make sure that these activities are age appropriate and link to the content of the tour and workshop you have chosen.



Garrison Room/Gaol/Cellar



Castle Keep stairs

Toilets

There are two toilets in the reception area on the first floor of the Black Gate, and two toilets in the Harbottle Suite (learning room) on the second floor. Both floors have one accessible toilet, and the accessible toilet on the first floor has baby changing facilities.

Please note there are **no** toilets in the Castle Keep at all. If necessary, it is advisable to use the toilets before leaving the Black Gate. If anyone in your group needs the toilet while in the Castle Keep, please quietly inform one of our guides that someone will be temporarily leaving the group during the tour. Send the child back to the Black Gate with a qualified adult accompanying them. If they need directions please ask a member of staff.

Fire Alarm

If the fire alarm goes off in either building during your visit, please follow all instructions given by our staff or guides. They will instruct you to evacuate via the stairs – please follow them to the designated assembly point. For both buildings this is underneath the railway arches between the Castle Keep and the Black Gate.

The alarm in the Castle Keep is a loud siren with a continuous tone. There are also sounders at various locations that announce that the fire alarm is going off. In the Black Gate, the alarm is a loud siren with two tones.

Please **do not** use the lift in the event of a fire. If anyone in your group cannot evacuate via the stairs, they should remain at one of the refuge points in the Black Gate and activate the buzzer by pressing the button.



Refuge point in the Black Gate



Designated assembly point

Temperature

Because the Castle Keep is an ancient stone building without any modern heating, it can be very cold, even when it is warm outside and especially in the winter. Please dress appropriately for your visit – this should include coats at all times of year and hats and gloves in the winter time.

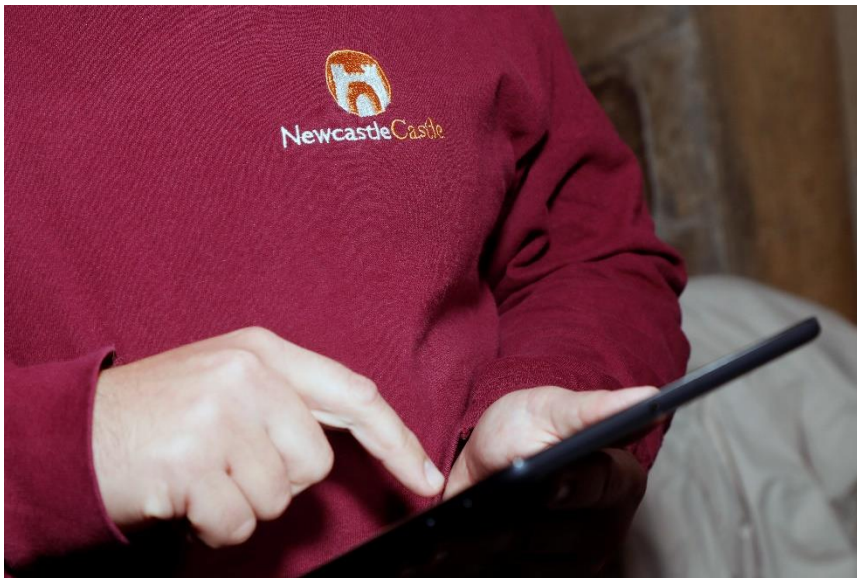


Induction Loops

The Black Gate reception area is the only area of Newcastle Castle that is equipped with an induction loop. We have a number of portable induction loops, please advise us in advance of your visit if you will need us to use one of these so that we can ensure it is fully charged before your visit.

Castle Staff

If you need any help during your visit you can either ask your guide or find a member of Newcastle Castle staff. They wear uniforms like this one, a red t-shirt with the Newcastle Castle logo embroidered onto it. They will also be wearing name badges.



Newcastle Castle staff uniform

Other Questions?

If you have any other questions please get in touch with our Learning Officer either by email (learning@newcastlecastle.co.uk) or by telephone (0191 230 6300)