



INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

WESTMINSTER SCHOOL

INTERIM INSPECTION

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

Westminster School

| | | | |
|---------------------------|--|------------|---------------------------------------|
| Full Name of School | Westminster School | | |
| DfE Number | 213/6047 | | |
| Registered Charity Number | 312728 | | |
| Address | Westminster School Little Dean's Yard London SW1P 3PF | | |
| Telephone Number | 020 7963 1042 | | |
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| Email Address | headmaster@westminster.org.uk | | |
| Head Master | Dr Stephen Spurr | | |
| Chairman of Governors | The Very Reverend Dr John Hall | | |
| Age Range | 13 to 18 | | |
| Total Number of Pupils | 749 | | |
| Gender of Pupils | Mixed (617 boys; 132 girls) | | |
| Numbers by Age | 11-16 | 364 | |
| | 16-18 | 385 | |
| Number of Day Pupils | Total: | 568 | Capacity for flexi-boarding: 0 |
| Number of Boarders | Total: | 181 | |
| | Full: | 181 | Weekly: 0 |
| Inspection dates | 23 Nov 2010 to 24 Nov 2010 | | |

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 November 2006.

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (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 2010*. The range of these Regulations is as follows.

- (a) Quality of education provided (curriculum)
- (b) Quality of education provided (teaching)
- (c) Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils
- (d) Welfare, health and safety of pupils
- (e) Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors
- (f) Premises and accommodation
- (g) Provision of information
- (h) Manner in which complaints are to be handled

*These Regulations replace those first introduced on 1 September 2003.

Legislation additional to Part 3, Welfare, health and safety of pupils, 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.

Under the Care Standards Act 2000, an inspection of boarding was carried out at the same time by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), Children's Services and Skills. The report of this inspection is available separately at www.ofsted.gov.uk under Children's social care/Boarding school.

The inspection of the school is from an educational perspective and provides limited inspection of other aspects, though inspectors will comment on any significant hazards or problems they encounter which have an adverse impact on children. The inspection does not include:

- (i) an exhaustive health and safety audit
- (ii) an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features
- (iii) an investigation of the financial viability of the school or its accounting procedures
- (iv) an in-depth investigation of the school's compliance with employment law.

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1. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

- 1.1 Westminster School is a selective day and boarding school for pupils aged from thirteen to eighteen, situated close to Westminster Abbey. Its origins can be traced back at least to 1179, when the Pope required the Benedictine monks of the Abbey of St Peter in Westminster to provide a small charity school. Following the dissolution of the monasteries in 1540, Henry VIII personally ensured the school's survival and, in 1560, Elizabeth I confirmed royal patronage on the joint foundation of Abbey and School. Its governing body includes, as well as a good number of others, members of the Abbey Chapter, with the Dean as Chairman. In addition to the Senior School, known as the Great School, governors also oversee the Under School for pupils younger than thirteen.
- 1.2 The Elizabethan founding principle that: "youth, which is growing to manhood as tender shoots in the wood of our state, shall be liberally instructed in good books to the greater honour of the state" underlies the school's academic and liberal tradition; pupils are expected to question assumptions and thus become liberated from dogma, prejudice or unthinking conformity. Within this tradition, the school strives for excellence in all areas and to develop pupils intellectually, socially, ethically and politically, so that they grow into responsible adults.
- 1.3 Pupils are admitted from the age of thirteen to the age of eighteen; it has a majority of day pupils but a boarding ethos. All pupils in Years 9 to 11 are boys, but the sixth form contains both boys and girls; girls make up about a third of the sixth-form pupils. At the time of the inspection, the school had 749 pupils, of whom 617 were boys and 132 were girls. Of these, 568 pupils were day pupils and 181 were boarders, most of whom go home at the weekend. Pupils come from the cosmopolitan background that is London and from a wide range of professional, academic and business backgrounds; about half of the pupils come from the Under School and the others from local preparatory or primary schools. Pupils are drawn from a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds. Almost all progress to university when they leave.
- 1.4 Entry is academically selective and the range of pupils' abilities is far above the national average. One pupil has a statement of special educational needs, and thirty others have been identified as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD), all of whom receive support provided by the school. No pupils need support for English as an additional language.
- 1.5 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school. The year group nomenclature used by the school and its National Curriculum (NC) equivalence are shown in the table below. The school refers to Years 9 to 11 as the Lower School and to Years 12 and 13 as the Upper School.

| School | NC name |
|-------------|---------|
| Fifth Form | Year 9 |
| Lower Shell | Year 10 |
| Upper Shell | Year 11 |
| Sixth Form | Year 12 |
| Remove | Year 13 |

2. THE SUCCESS OF THE SCHOOL

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

- 2.1 Pupils achieve excellent standards in their levels of scholarship as well as in their examination results. They constantly question and debate issues, rather than accepting what they are told at face value. As a result, they grow into exceptional students who are well prepared for their places at highly competitive universities, both in the United Kingdom and overseas.
- 2.2 From the outset, pupils construct well-developed arguments based on first-class research, for example discussing the historical significance of figures commemorated in the Abbey or the role of the Commonwealth today. They develop high standards of literacy and numeracy, supported by effective use of information and communications technology (ICT). They make shrewd deductions from evidence, extrapolate from earlier learning and take risks in approaching complex subjects such as globalisation. They debate the significance of God's justice over breakfast with the chaplains, relate changes in art to those in science in tutorial discussion before school and show a high level of response to linguistic and critical challenge in English. Some sixth-form students publish original research in science and others write well-argued prize essays on subjects as diverse as *12th century Europe and the growth of western Liberalisation*, and *Neo-classical economic imperialism*. They have a quick grasp of key issues, for instance when evaluating conflicting views about Queen Elizabeth's parliaments.
- 2.3 Outside class, pupils produce high standards in a wide range of activities, whether gaining gold medals in academic competitions such as Science Olympiads, winning the Senior Team Mathematics Challenge, achieving success in the Young Engineer for Britain competition, playing in the National Youth and London Schools' Symphony Orchestras or acting with the National Youth Theatre. Sports teams and individuals achieve high levels of success including national representation across a wide range of disciplines.
- 2.4 This analysis uses the years 2007 to 2009. These are the most recent three years for which comparative statistics are currently available. Pupils achieve exceptional examination results. Those at GCSE are far above the national average for boys in maintained schools and above the national average for boys in maintained selective schools. During these years, the percentage of A* grades increased from two-thirds to four-fifths and almost all grades were at A* or A level. Performance in IGCSE was above international and UK norms. Over the same period, A-level results were far above the national average for maintained selective schools. During this period, nine-tenths of grades were grade A. In 2010, half the grades were at the new A* level and two-thirds of pre-U results were at an equivalent standard. Pupils of all levels of ability make outstanding progress, both in examination success and in scholarship; both pupils and parents are delighted with this progress. Pupils develop into excellent students, who persevere when solving problems, work well together, respond positively to challenge and produce careful written work.
- 2.5 Pupils' academic success is supported by a diverse and varied curriculum and an excellent range of activities. For example, GCSE science arrangements are flexible, the choice of modern and classical languages is substantial and pupils are strongly encouraged to develop practical skills as well as theoretical ones. The wide range of

opportunities outside class includes attending lectures from public figures and both running and addressing the school's many academic societies. In addition, the wide programme of activities makes excellent use of central London facilities as well as providing a broad range of adventurous and cultural expeditions in the UK. Alongside sports, music, drama and other creative pursuits, pupils engage in a wide range of community activities which the school is seeking to develop more fully.

- 2.6 Pupils' success is also supported by excellent teaching, which constantly challenges and engages them. Teachers give constant feedback, both in lessons and when marking work, asking questions or suggesting further lines of enquiry. Excellent pace, whilst allowing time for individual questions, stimulates pupils' thinking, as does the wide variety of methods used. Pupils of all abilities thus progress extremely well. Teaching is supported by thorough assessment, which identifies any pupils who need extra support or encouragement quickly. Pupils are confident in the support they receive from teachers and say they value the way they are regarded in the classroom.

The quality of the pupils' personal development

- 2.7 Pupils' excellent personal development is founded on outstanding personal relationships, both between themselves and with adults, reflecting the high priority given to pastoral care. This is supported by a well-planned programme of personal, social and health education and, for some, by the opportunity to board. Pupils are spiritually aware, sceptical rather than cynical, mutually respectful and courteously irreverent. They are lively and engaged, questioning and challenging, and value the Abbey as both an historic and a spiritual focus. Pupils' self-awareness and self-confidence enable them to take the initiative in managing their own lives and developing their approach to learning. They learn to take risks and sometimes to fail, in a supportive culture.
- 2.8 Pupils' outstanding social development makes them fully aware of their role in the community, seeing both home and school as an extended family. Pupil-led societies reflect some pupils' passions and interests. Others play important roles as monitors (prefects) or as members of the school council. Excellent moral awareness is reflected through community service and a keen awareness of ethical issues. Pupils understand the importance of their individual commitment to helping others. They enjoy the cultural stimulus of London, and that of the school. Many are engaged in art, drama and music. Pupils of different cultures are well integrated. The school's historic, cultural and religious setting provides pupils with a keen awareness of the interplay between political, creative and philosophical issues.
- 2.9 Pupils enjoy outstanding relationships with adults, and the excellent support they receive enables them to support others. Pupils say they feel treated as equals, spoken to like adults, included in decisions and able to speak to a range of people freely about things which are important to them. Opportunities for counselling and peer mentoring foster a culture in which help is easily given and easily received. Both day and boarding pupils see housemasters as the main focus of a network which also includes tutors, year heads, subject teachers, chaplains, matrons and the counsellor, all of whom are alert to bullying, though this rarely occurs. Boarders are well cared for, enjoy excellent relationships with boarding staff, and benefit from a dedicated boarding staff team. Boarding is well managed and boarders relate well to day members of the school. Although a significant number of pupils felt the school did not listen to their views, the school council is being successfully

developed as a group with clearer boundaries so it can influence day-to-day matters. There are appropriate arrangements for child protection, including staff training.

The effectiveness of governance, leadership and management

- 2.10 The school has excellent links with parents; an extremely high proportion of their responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire were positive with no areas of concern. Parents are delighted with the information they receive about the school and about their children's progress, with their opportunities to be involved, with the ease of communication and with the response to any concerns; the school has an appropriate policy for more serious complaints but this is rarely needed. Inspectors agreed with all these views. School reports give a detailed and helpful picture of pupils' progress and how it may be improved.
- 2.11 The governing body gives excellent oversight and leadership, bringing to its business a substantial range of relevant experience and a clear vision of the key values the school espouses. Their meetings bring them into contact with a range of senior staff which, combined with less formal contact with the school, gives them a clear view of its strengths and any current priorities. They give careful oversight to child protection and health and safety, and other regulatory matters.
- 2.12 Excellent leadership and management provide a strong focus on the school's key work of developing scholarship, promoting a sense of values and developing civic responsibility. Improved management structures have created clearer lines of communication, and appraisal based on peer-review has created more opportunities for the sharing of good practice. More support is given to professional development, especially in the continuing development of scholarship amongst the staff, and the roles of heads of department are more clearly delineated. As a result, the quality of pupils' education, already high, is kept under constant review with the aim of improving it further, as expressed in a clear and effective development plan. This includes imaginative initiatives such as teaching studentships and visiting fellows. Meticulous care is taken over the recruitment of staff, and proper training is provided in child protection. The school is complex but runs smoothly, and its buildings are well maintained and have been successfully adapted to modern use. The school benefits much from its distinctive and historic setting, and from the considerable commitment of both teaching and non-teaching staff to the exceptional care and education provided to all its pupils.

3. ACTION POINTS

(i) 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 2010.

(ii) Recommendation for further improvement

- 3.2 The school is advised to make the following improvement.

1. In keeping with the school's development plan, build on the significant progress in embedding civic responsibility in the experience of all pupils.

INSPECTION EVIDENCE

The inspectors observed a small sample of 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 and a colleague, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended registration sessions, Latin Prayers and assemblies. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined regulatory documentation made available by the school.

The National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools were inspected by a team of three Ofsted inspectors over three days.

Inspectors

Mr Ian Newton

Reporting Inspector

Mrs Elizabeth Cairncross

Head, HMC School