



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

EDUCATIONAL QUALITY INSPECTION

WESTMINSTER SCHOOL

16 TO 17 NOVEMBER 2016



SCHOOL'S DETAILS

| | | | | |
|----------------------------------|--|-----|----------|-----|
| 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 | | | |
| Email address | headmaster@westminster.org.uk | | | |
| Head Master | Mr Patrick Derham | | | |
| Chair of governors | The Very Reverend Dr John Hall | | | |
| Age range | 13 to 18 | | | |
| Number of pupils | 742 | | | |
| | Boys | 622 | Girls | 120 |
| | Day pupils | 563 | Boarders | 179 |
| | Sixth Form | 392 | | |
| Inspection dates | 16 to 17 November 2016 | | | |

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.

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 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 following their inspection 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 unmet standards identified at their previous inspection.

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.

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 an EDUCATIONAL QUALITY inspection, reporting 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 grade descriptors from those used in previous inspection frameworks. The judgements made on this inspection are, therefore, not directly comparable to judgements made on previous inspections.

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 in the published report but will have been considered by the team in reaching its judgements.

Both Ofsted and ISI inspect and report on the Independent School Standards Regulations. However, they 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 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'.

INSPECTION EVIDENCE

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 and another governor, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended chapel and assemblies. Inspectors visited boarding houses, together with the learning support and educational resource areas. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined curriculum and other documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| Mr Martin Bussey | Reporting inspector |
| Mr Magnus Cowie | Team inspector (Deputy head, HMC school) |
| Mr Neil Mason | Team inspector (Former deputy head, HMC school) |
| Mr Graeme May | Team inspector (Deputy head, HMC school) |
| Mr Guy Sanderson | Team inspector (Head, HMC school) |
| Mr Crispin Dawson | Team inspector for boarding (Deputy head, HMC school) |
| Ms Emma Picken | Team inspector for boarding (Head of boarding, GSA school) |

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1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

About the school

- 1.1 Westminster School traces its history back to 1179 when Pope Alexander required the Benedictine monks of Westminster Abbey to provide for the education of boys from the immediate locality. After the dissolution of the monasteries, a commitment was made to ensure the school's survival and in 1560 Queen Elizabeth I confirmed royal patronage on the joint foundation of Westminster Abbey and School. Most buildings are situated on a World Heritage Site within the precincts of Westminster Abbey, with some buildings and playing fields located a short distance away. The statutes of 1560 provide for 40 Queen's Scholars, and the same number exists today.
- 1.2 It is a day and boarding school, for boys from age 13, and co-educational in the sixth form. Around a quarter of pupils board in one of six all-age boarding houses. These are mixed except for two boys-only houses and one girls-only house. The school is still governed by statutes issued by Order in Council but is financially independent of the Abbey. It is a registered charity, overseen by a governing body, currently numbering 22 members. Since the previous ISI Interim inspection in 2010, a new girls' boarding house and a new indoor sports centre have been opened, the medical centre has been relocated, and a new chapel has been acquired. The head master took up office in September 2014.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.3 The school aims to be a highly academic school where individual and corporate excellence is promoted. It considers the dialogue between teachers and their pupils, whether in the classroom or in tutorials, to be central to its ethos, thus aiming to inspire passion for learning, convey knowledge and develop the skills of rational, independent thought, and liberation from dogma, prejudice or unthinking conformity. It seeks to encourage pupils' enjoyment of academic enquiry, debate and search for explanation well beyond any published syllabus within happy, busy and purposeful environments characterised by intellectual, social, ethical and political engagement, with plenty of opportunities for pupils to develop initiatives and to articulate and defend their views. It is committed to a liberal tradition which nurtures each pupil's spiritual, moral, emotional and physical development and well-being in preparation for fulfilled private and public lives beyond school.

About the pupils

- 1.4 Pupils come mainly from a range of professional and business family backgrounds, drawn from London and throughout the UK, and also from overseas. There are 58 pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), of whom 38 receive support for a broad range of needs. No pupil has an education, health and care plan. An extremely small number of pupils have English as an additional language and receive targeted support. The school's ability profile reflects its academically selective admissions policy, and the school considers that all pupils require teaching which meets the needs of more able pupils and suits individual talents.
- 1.5 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school. The school's own names differ from those used nationally and the details are given in the table below:

| | |
|--------------------|---------------------------------|
| <i>School name</i> | <i>National Curriculum name</i> |
|--------------------|---------------------------------|

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

Recommendations from previous inspections

- 1.6 The previous full inspection of the school by ISI was an interim inspection in November 2010. The recommendation from that inspection was:
- In keeping with the school's development plan, build on the significant progress in embedding civic responsibility in the experience of all pupils.

2. KEY FINDINGS

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

- Pupils develop exceptionally strong knowledge, skills and understanding across all areas of learning, enabled by highly developed learning skills and attitudes to learning, which they are able to apply expertly.
- Pupils' communication skills are highly developed, assisted significantly by the example pupils are set by teachers, who are excellent role-models.
- Pupils demonstrate extremely high levels of political awareness and understanding for their age and debate contemporary issues with high levels of articulacy.
- Pupils with SEND make progress consistent with that of their peers, enabled by effective learning strategies identified and employed by the study skills department, although not all subject teaching uses these consistently.

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

- Pupils develop very high levels of self-confidence, self-reliance and resilience.
- Pupils listen to others intently in all aspects of their school lives and wish to learn from them; all pupils are confident to express their views knowing that they are respected by other pupils and adults.
- Pupils demonstrate a readiness to engage in service outside the school with great enthusiasm and do so with great integrity.

Recommendations

2.3 In the context of the excellent outcomes for pupils, the school may wish to:

- Pursue current initiatives to improve support for pupils with SEND in the classroom to achieve complete consistency.

3. THE QUALITY OF PUPILS' ACADEMIC AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS

- 3.1 The quality of pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.
- 3.2 Pupils develop exceptionally strong knowledge, skills and understanding across all areas of learning. In debating contemporary American politics, some of the youngest pupils showed knowledge and understanding of recent events and current affairs far in advance of their years. Older pupils' programme notes for a recent concert show a strong grasp of trends in musical history and cultural movements. Such levels of knowledge are enabled by teaching which demonstrates very high levels of scholarship. Pupils can apply their learning expertly in diverse situations. For example, younger pupils were able to compare expansionist policies in history prior to the First World War to current political situations. In IGCSE biology, pupils used their excellent prior knowledge and understanding to describe possible pathways of viral replication. Such high levels of achievement are often promoted by teaching which challenges pupils to apply their knowledge in unfamiliar situations.
- 3.3 The most able pupils, in a pupil body where ability is consistently well above the national average, work at levels more common to early university work. This is demonstrated in essays for the extended project qualification and the school's own essay competitions, such as that associated with the 'Cultural Perspectives' programme, although such levels of achievement are by no means limited to this group. These levels of achievement fulfil with resounding success for all pupils the school's aim to encourage pupils' enjoyment of academic enquiry, debate and search for explanation well beyond any published syllabus.
- 3.4 Pupils' high attainment is evident in their performance in public examinations. The following analysis uses national data for the years 2012 to 2015. These are the most recent three years for which comparative statistics are currently available, but results in 2016 maintain similar levels of attainment. Results in GCSE examinations have been far above the national average for maintained schools and above the average when compared with GCSE results for maintained selective schools. Results in IGCSE have been higher than worldwide norms.
- 3.5 Results in A-level examinations have been far above the national average for maintained schools and well above the national average when compared with A-level results for maintained selective schools. Results in Pre-U examinations have been above the national average. When A-level and Pre-U results are viewed together, over half of pupils have gained awards at A* or its Pre-U equivalent consistently since these grades were instituted. Almost all leavers proceed to universities in the UK with demanding entry requirements or to universities in the USA with similarly high levels of demand for entry.
- 3.6 These results indicate excellent progress over time in relation to pupils of similar abilities. This rate of progress is replicated in lessons and in pupils' work and is consistent for all groups of pupils in the school, including those with SEND. Responses to pre-inspection questionnaires by both pupils and parents show that almost all agree that the school enables high levels of progress.
- 3.7 Other achievements by pupils, across a wide range of activities, are at equally high levels. Boats win national rowing competitions, the school has won the national tennis competition for independent schools and pupils have won gold medals in national martial arts competitions. Pupils regularly win places in the National Youth Orchestra and are awarded organ and choral awards at university in high numbers. Drama is strong; pupils' translation of a Latin play, and their performance in it, demonstrated extremely high levels of achievement for their age. Pupils win gold medals in linguistics, science, and Latin and Greek speaking competitions. They win awards at national and international Model United Nations conferences, and pupils have represented Great Britain at bridge.

- 3.8 Pupils are highly articulate and are able to explain their thinking. They manifest a strong culture of listening to others, taking staff as their role models; pupils are interested in what others have to say and respond in ways which move lessons and activities forward. They produce highly accomplished writing; their reading is fluent and intelligent, as exemplified when pupils use the school's distinctive pronunciation of Latin. Pupils preparing for the school's commemoration of benefactors not only spoke, but sang Latin hymns and prayers with confidence and commitment to a longstanding school tradition. Similarly, a high level of confidence and competence are evident in reading and comprehension in modern foreign languages.
- 3.9 Pupils' mathematical skills are strong and are applied to excellent effect in other subjects such as economics and science. As well as demonstrating accuracy in their calculations, pupils are able to conceptualise the mathematical method of the solutions they produce. This demonstrates a depth of understanding which is common in mathematics throughout the school. They use information and communication technology (ICT) very effectively to create their own presentations and projects in the many pupil-led activities. Older pupils in chemistry created a video which demonstrated scientific facts in an imaginative and innovative way.
- 3.10 The ability to process information quickly, to analyse situations and develop their own solutions to problems is a strong characteristic of pupils' learning. High levels of challenge in both the curriculum and teaching frequently promote the development of these skills. Pupils utilise these skills profitably on the few occasions when teaching does not offer such levels of challenge, although occasionally this results in disengagement. Pupils with SEND comment that they benefit greatly from the learning strategies identified as appropriate to their needs by the study skills department and employed in specialist teaching. They feel that they are enabled to use these strategies in most of their learning in the classroom, following initiatives by senior leaders to promote this, although this is not yet always consistent. The implementation of such initiatives to the benefit of pupils' achievement, which has included the broader development of learning skills, results from highly successful self-evaluation by senior leaders of pupils' needs.
- 3.11 Throughout the school, pupils demonstrate a very positive approach to learning. Tasks are completed at a rapid pace, allowing a high volume of work to be completed in individual lessons. Pupils show great enjoyment and passion in all that they do. They are confident to challenge each other in discussion. Initiative and independent thinking are overwhelmingly strong characteristics of pupils' learning. Pupils also fall naturally into learning collaboratively, whether working in pairs, as teaching frequently enables them to do in order to share ideas, or simply explaining ideas or tasks to one another. They do this successfully because they are confident in each other's learning, and supportive of one another.

4. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

- 4.1 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 4.2 Pupils are self-reflective but also consistently interested in others. When discussing their learning and development, pupils commented, 'We are very aware where we've got to'. Pupils set themselves targets and goals and work towards them very effectively. They acknowledge that perseverance is a characteristic necessary to make the most of the school's stimulating but demanding programme of curricular and extra-curricular opportunities. They readily develop this attribute to a high degree. Confident in themselves, they are resilient in their approach to life inside and out of school. Pupils express their delight in how the school has encouraged them to explore beyond the boundaries of what they might have thought they could do. They acknowledge that their ability to accomplish this owes much to the excellent levels of care they receive within an environment of healthy challenge.
- 4.3 In responses to the questionnaire, which showed exceptionally high levels of satisfaction overall, almost all parents agreed that their child's pastoral and welfare needs are met. This was reflected in parents' comments and responses to the pupils' questionnaire which identified kindness as a key characteristic of the school's ethos, demonstrated by adults and pupils alike. In particular, both day and boarding pupils identify the house system as key to their development of confidence and resilience. They recognise the high levels of support they receive from housemasters and also through strong relationships within houses between pupils, within their own age group but especially across different ages. Supportive relationships between older and younger pupils, often evident through quiet exchanges of words, are characteristic of the school as a whole. Pupils also commented that they gain confidence through their experiences during the many residential courses, in which all participate, and through service outside school.
- 4.4 Pupils mix easily across the wide range of cultures, faiths and nationalities represented in the school, enhanced by the boarding experience. Pupils talked positively about the regular talks on sexism, feminism, LGBT issues and acceptance of different lifestyles and faiths that they receive. Many of these are initiated by pupils and given by them or, suitably monitored, by speakers they invite. The school's liberal ethos, tirelessly promoted by senior leaders to the pupils' benefit, truly engenders a pupil body liberated from dogma, prejudice or unthinking conformity, as the school's aims envisage. This means that pupils engage in robust, informed debate from the start of their time at the school, both with their fellow pupils and with adults. They hold strong views and challenge any perceived focus by staff on a particular viewpoint. A small minority of pupils in response to the questionnaire felt that teachers do not always give a balanced view in discussing politics and current affairs. Inspection evidence shows that both staff and pupils engage in robust debate which avoids extremes and ensures that all sides of arguments are represented; this was specifically commented on by some pupils in the questionnaire. The vast majority of parents in questionnaire responses confirmed that the school actively promotes values of democracy, respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs. Inspection evidence supports this view.
- 4.5 Pupils are passionate in developing and sharing their interests and thinking. They reflect on all that they encounter; they question, and develop well-informed values artistically, spiritually, philosophically and intellectually. They use reflective time in Latin Prayers fruitfully and discuss topics of personal significance in the chaplain's breakfast event. Their participation in community work outside of school is borne of a belief in its value to others, and to themselves in terms of their personal development. They show a strong commitment to this work, enthused by the school's civic engagement programme which leads pupils to

work in schools and other institutions before or after school. These demanding commitments outside a long school day are fulfilled with great integrity. The annual PHAB programme for a week in the summer brings together around 50 older pupils with around 35 guests who are physically or mentally disabled. Pupils commented on the high profile this holds in the school and their fulfilment from engaging in it; younger pupils spoke of how they look forward to taking their turn in the project. These responses typify the strong sense of civic engagement that pupils show, confirming that the recommendation of the previous inspection has been met with great success. This engagement is strengthened by fruitful interaction with students from the school's sponsored, local sixth-form college.

- 4.6 The well-developed views and opinions held by pupils often show a clear moral or ethical basis. For example, discussion of the effectiveness of the United Nations Security Council in a well-attended law society meeting showed great seriousness of purpose and posed carefully considered questions of moral balance. Pupils are mutually supportive in developing accepted codes of behaviour; senior pupils give effective and influential input on anti-bullying measures during reviews of behaviour policies and their implementation. In a class discussion, younger pupils identified clearly why plagiarism is wrong in individual research. Discussion with pupils after Latin Prayers confirmed that moral messages from pupils are a regular feature of that event, and that this helps to provide a strong moral code subscribed to by all. Pupils feel the rules of the school and the rule of law are understood and adhered to, whilst senior leaders and other staff always allow for the 'liberal dissent' appropriate to the school's ethos to be voiced.
- 4.7 Those pupils with responsibilities fulfil them with purpose and commitment, for example in organising presentations to pupils, house events, school societies and sports teams, as well as in acting as trained peer supporters. Musical ensembles, debates and other activities show pupils engaging in mutual support with strong concentration towards common aims. This enables the high levels of success which characterise events such as the Latin Play and participation in sporting competitions. Pupils are well prepared to make decisions and do so; older pupils accept that career choices are theirs to make and they are well positioned to make them. Older pupils talked with pride about the fact that they are allowed a degree of independence and that their decisions are respected.
- 4.8 Responses to the pupils' questionnaire confirm overwhelmingly that pupils feel they know how to stay safe, and this was underlined in their interview responses. Pupils in Year 11 commented positively on the impact of tutor sessions on healthy living they had experienced in Year 9. Pupils' well-being is secure, including in mental and physical health. For boarders, the excellent care they receive from boarding house staff, including matrons, and from the medical centre, makes a significant contribution to their well-being and this care is provided, as relevant, to day pupils at similarly high levels. Pupils commented that the response to any individual pupil's need in terms of welfare is prompt and well-focused. They consider that this gives them a sense of security which enables them to develop successfully as individuals in terms of their sexuality, beliefs, and physical and emotional well-being. Pupils take regular exercise and can choose physical activities that suit them, enabling them to develop a balanced lifestyle.
- 4.9 Pupils feel very well prepared for their future lives and state that their experience at school means that they have no apprehension for the future. They consider that school life prepares them to balance heavy workloads, to know how to learn from others and provide mutual support, including through voluntary work. Inspection evidence firmly supports this view.