

# School inspection report

27 to 29 February 2024

## **Westminster School**

Little Dean's Yard

London

SW1P 3PF

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## Summary of inspection findings

1. Governors have a sharp oversight of all aspects of school life. They undertake a range of activities to check on the effectiveness of leaders' work. They identify risk in each of the elements of wellbeing and take action to mitigate.
2. Governors are self-critical and open to change. For example, they have commissioned external reviews of pupils' attitudes and behaviour related to gender and race. Leaders have used the recommendations and findings to rejuvenate the content and teaching of the school's personal development, relationships and sex education programme.
3. Teachers have significant subject knowledge. They use lessons to draw out and discuss ideas that stretch and challenge pupils' thinking. As a result, pupils develop a sophisticated interest in their studies and a strong moral awareness, as well as achieving consistently high examination results.
4. The intellectual challenge of lessons provokes high levels of interest in pupils and consequently they organise a wide spectrum of initiatives organised by pupils. Pupils produce publications representing most academic subject areas; they present academic papers to their peers, and speak to other pupils and staff about their personal experiences and views. Over a third of pupils are involved in pupil-led volunteer work. Leaders successfully encourage pupils to show initiative and to contribute to society. This is reflected in the width, quality and typicality of these activities. This is a significant strength of the school.
5. Leaders have underpinned a culture in which pupils of all backgrounds develop self-esteem and the ability to reflect. The personal development programme enables them to refresh and inform their attitudes to physical and mental health and relationship issues. Pupils trust and respect each other. Many pupils are committed to one of the world's religious faiths, and gain spiritual stimulation from discussions that develop in lessons, and from weekly Latin Prayers.
6. Leaders have robustly reacted to previous concerns over the stances of a small minority of pupils to those of different gender and race. Relationships across the school are now characterised by sophisticated respect and tolerance. National societies led by pupils explore sensitive cultural and political issues.
7. An education about finance and the wider economy is threaded through the curriculum. Pupils receive informed, up-to-date advice on university entry, and many receive offers from leading universities. Pupils in all years receive effective careers guidance. However, a broad experience of employers and employees at work is not yet established.
8. Leaders make available a coherent set of documents and policies for use by staff, parents and pupils. They invite ideas, challenge and criticism at all levels.
9. The school's safeguarding arrangements are continually reviewed and revised. Safeguarding leaders consider in detail any risks to individuals and groups of pupils and take mitigative action. Pupils feel safe. The needs of boarders and female pupils in the sixth form are well considered. The coherent approach to safeguarding issues ensures that pupils' wellbeing is promoted.

## The extent to which the school meets the Standards

- Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance, are met.
- Standards relating to the quality of education, training and recreation are met.
- Standards relating to pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing are met.
- Standards relating to pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society are met.
- Standards relating to safeguarding are met.

## Recommended next steps

Leaders should:

- ensure that the careers programme is improved by providing opportunities for pupils to engage with a wide range of employers and employees
- continue the planned upgrading of changing and toilet facilities for female pupils.

## Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

10. Governors maintain a studious overview of all aspects of managing risk and monitoring academic performance and pupils' pastoral welfare. They achieve this through a comprehensive programme of evaluation, including listening directly to the views of pupils. Governors are careful to find ways to listen to those views that might be harder to hear.
11. Governors both commissioned and published external reviews about approaches to gender and race. This is an example of leaders' continuous self-analytical approach and their openness to critical opinion. As a result of the reviews, the school's personal development programme, including relationships and sex education, has been radically adjusted.
12. The process of self-evaluation and critical reflection has led to progress across relationships within the school, pupil to pupil and pupil to staff. These relationships are characterised by mutual trust, respect and care. Leaders actively encourage pupils to debate or speak publicly on moral issues.
13. In every area of school life leaders have the skills and knowledge to ensure that the Standards are met, and implementation regularly evaluated. Procedures and protocols are shaped around the best interests of pupils, and in many cases, particularly in boarding, are drawn up in collaboration with pupils. Leaders are open, flexible and forward-thinking, cognisant of the school's tradition, but recognising the changing dynamics of the school as co-education is introduced, and the developing experiences of teenagers.
14. Governors, leaders and teachers share a passion for a style of education that attempts, successfully, to stimulate pupils' intellect and support rather than lead pupils' initiatives. Through this approach, the liberal aims of the school are articulated in lessons, in activities, and in interactions between staff and pupils.
15. Governors support leaders in devising a set of coherent strategic long-, medium- and short-term plans for the school. Boarding accommodation continues to be refurbished. The staffing of support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) has been restructured to improve its effectiveness.
16. School life is rooted in a thorough, well-organised suite of policies, supporting documents and risk assessments. They are accessible to staff, pupils and parents and implemented effectively to promote the safety of pupils, including those who board. Leaders liaise and collaborate with external agencies, for example local children's services, both when necessary and to keep in touch with any contextual trends.
17. Regular meetings, protocols, record keeping and clear open communication with staff, parents and pupils contribute to a unified sense of purpose. Necessary information is supplied to local authorities for pupils in receipt of public funds.

### The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance

**All the relevant Standards are met.**

## Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

18. Leaders have created a broad curriculum and co-curricular programme that ignites and stimulates pupils' interest. Leaders encourage pupils to choose options that are both ambitious and wide ranging at GCSE. For example, leaders offer an extensive range of modern and classical foreign languages and a wide choice of land- and water-based sports during games sessions. Subject leaders have devised schemes of work that plan effectively to develop pupils' knowledge and understanding across the range of subjects. Pupils consistently achieve high grades in GCSE, A level and pre-university examinations.
19. Leaders oversee a whole-school assessment framework that evaluates the short- and long-term progress of pupils' academic attainment and personal development. Subject leaders devise and use assessment methods and criteria pertinent to their departments. Leaders use both whole-school and subject-specific data to monitor pupils' work and performance regularly, and share it with pupils who in turn identify areas where they can improve.
20. Teachers have a deep understanding of and passion for their subjects, and a mastery of pedagogical techniques. Teachers are intellectually nimble in their response to pupils' questions and encourage the exploration of pupils' ideas. Lessons are characterised by the collaboration of both teachers and pupils in academic discovery. Teachers use their knowledge to guide pupils skilfully in their own independent learning by pointing them to source material or referencing differing viewpoints. As a result, pupils are energised, engaged and show a desire to advance their own knowledge. Teachers use the school's resources judiciously to extend pupils' experiences, for example promoting research in the library, trialling artificial intelligence, or allowing pupils to use sophisticated science equipment.
21. Those involved in the admission of pupils to the school ensure that pupils are well prepared before starting, and that the school is aware of each pupil's needs. A detailed profile is created for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Leaders ensure that teachers are well trained in meeting a variety of individual needs in lessons, and they in turn adjust in planning and implementation. Teachers provide support in lessons for pupils who have SEND.
22. Most pupils speak a language in addition to English at home. Levels of fluency are tested on admission and, if needed, intense support is provided in a pupil's first half term at the school. Teachers allow time for discussion and debate, and as a result pupils listen well and are articulate communicators.
23. Leaders ensure that pupils are not discriminated against based on their gender, race, faith, or sexual orientation. Staff provide informed, detailed and extensive guidance to female pupils joining the sixth form. Consequently, female pupils are well integrated and are confident to share their thoughts.
24. Pupils further their abilities and interests in a plethora of societies, assemblies, and forums. Many of them take part in national sporting events, essay prizes and debating competitions. Opportunities in, for example, music or drama are equally accessible to day and boarding pupils. Boarders are heavily involved but also have ample free time. Leaders provide well-thought-out programmes in which pupils develop the skills needed for their future lives, for example living independently and managing budgets.

**The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to the quality of education, training and recreation**

**All the relevant Standards are met.**

## Section 3: Pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing

25. The school's values, ethos and promotion of a liberal education encourage mutual respect and the protection of difference, for examples in gender, faith and national background. The diverse programme of assemblies and services contribute to a curriculum that develops pupils' spiritual and moral understanding. Teachers and senior pupils take the opportunity to speak about and confront contemporary issues in the context of promoting understanding, respect and tolerance of difference. Senior pupils have developed the confidence to share with the whole school their own personal experiences, and other pupils listen empathetically to the often-sophisticated arguments made.
26. Teachers use the curriculum to engender and underpin an atmosphere of mutual trust and regard for reasoned opinion. They, and hence pupils, use affirmative language in discussion, acknowledging and valuing others' points before challenging them with their own. Consequently, pupils' self-esteem grows, and they become highly reflective.
27. Leaders have used the recommendations of external reviews commissioned since the previous inspection to influence a revised curriculum to support pupils' personal development, particularly in the areas of relationships and sex education (RSE). Teachers are trained to deliver the RSE curriculum through the sharing of ideas and to allow pupils to raise matters for discussions. Teachers often start lessons with philosophical concepts before leading to practical application. The content and approach are ambitious, and especially seek to confront previous concerns about attitudes of male to female pupils, and to racial and religious differences.
28. The personal development programme includes all the necessary elements of a health education. This strengthens pupils' awareness of the importance of physical exercise, which is reflected in their enthusiastic involvement in the wide range of individual and team sports available. Teachers are conscious of the pressure that pupils exert on themselves and the potential impact on their mental health. Housemasters encourage pupils' participation in school life whilst protecting them from over-activity.
29. The school promotes positive behaviour with a written policy, which lists available sanctions, but more so through the consistent messages given by senior leaders, teachers and pastoral staff. Teachers work closely with pupils in lessons and many other areas of school life, and consequently pupils feel respected. Leaders provide wide-ranging training so that teachers understand pupils' anxieties and behaviour, thereby many issues can be addressed through sensitively held conversations. Teachers have an informed cognisance of, and adjust approaches to address, the particular behaviour needs of some pupils. As a result, pupils' behaviour is calm, positive and respectful.
30. The school's arrangements to limit bullying are securely documented. They include advice for pupils, guidance for teachers, and actions that would be taken to support alleged perpetrator and victim. Bullying rarely happens.
31. Leaders have used space innovatively, and provided premises and boarding accommodation that meets the education, pastoral and medical needs of pupils. First aid is provided promptly when



needed by trained first aiders. Toilet and changing facilities meet requirements, but leaders recognise that some facilities for female pupils require upgrading.

32. Access to buildings both on the main site and satellite buildings is controlled. Protocols to limit any risk to pupils between lessons are understood by staff and pupils. Those responsible maintain an accurate admission and attendance register of pupils. They gather information from pupils' previous schools and report to the appropriate local authority if pupils join or leave at non-standard points in the year.
33. Health and safety protocols and procedures to prevent fire are robust and recognise the wide range of school buildings, and their shared usage. Records are detailed but summary documents make it easy for leaders and governors with responsibility to make regular checks of implementation. The particular risks to boarders are identified. Fire evacuation practices take place each term throughout the school with regular practices taking place in boarding time.
34. School and boarding leaders ensure that the physical needs of boarders are met by providing high quality accommodation, opportunities to exercise and relax, and a varied choice of food in the dining halls and boarding houses. Pupils have regular meetings with senior and boarding leaders, and in addition to regular surveys this enables them to share ideas and any concerns. Arrangements are effective for providing boarders with clean laundry, storing their possessions, and travelling safely to and from home at the beginning and end of term. The school's medical centre provides first aid support during the day alongside resident matrons who also provide support throughout boarding time.

### **The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing**

**All the relevant Standards are met.**

## Section 4: Pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society

35. The curriculum and wide spectrum of pupil-led societies give pupils a rich education in, and forums to discuss, human and social issues. Leaders have a deep understanding of the potential of the academically able pupils the school recruits and the need to give space and time for pupils to develop intellectually and socially. This is reflected in the school's mantra that individual excellence is expected and promoted in an atmosphere of open-minded enquiry without dogma, prejudice or unthinking conformity. Leaders promote opportunities for pupils to articulate their views, and to listen to other perspectives and commit to ethical action and political awareness. Recently pupils have led assemblies on mental health and a range of topical issues.
36. Teachers expertly stimulate pupils' highly inquisitive and creative intellects, and hence engender intellectual, social, moral and political engagement amongst pupils. Leaders and teachers spark and support pupils' interests, and strongly encourage pupil-led initiatives. Senior pupils organise a Mental Health Week which successfully promotes the positive impact of various strategies.
37. The annual society fair provides pupils with opportunities to explore new areas of interest. Pupils contribute in a variety of ways to the learning experience of fellow pupils. They give lectures on academic topics. Lectures on *Oedipus: Fables and Historic* and *Can you be Trans and a Feminist* are typical of most weeks. Pupils contribute to and edit annual or termly magazines in most academic disciplines: "Hooke", the science magazine, and "Camden", the liberal arts magazine reflect the width of coverage. Pupils initiate and organise an annual Festival of Physics in which they present their own private research.
38. Pupils of all ages are educated about economic issues. The curriculum includes elements that inform pupils about handling their own finances at university and beyond. Younger pupils explore ways to secure sponsorship in their "Formula One" society, and other groups learn about financial negotiation in "Dragon's Den"-style activities. Sixth form pupils discuss the relationship between interest rates and mortgage availability and contribute well-researched articles to the pupil-produced termly Westminster Economist magazine, for example *Navigation of the Treasury Market* and *How Much are you worth?*
39. Pupils have opportunities in lessons and beyond to deepen both their appreciation and understanding of cultural, religious and racial backgrounds. Pupils organise an annual "One World Week", rooted in the plethora of national groups, for example the Slavic, Korean and Afro-Caribbean societies. Leaders have created an atmosphere of respect, in which pupils are kind and tolerant, and happy to mingle with and benefit from the experience of those from different backgrounds, both amongst their own school population and from visiting schools. The school's pupil-led volunteering society coordinates opportunities for pupils to work in primary schools, hospitals, and with refugees.
40. In lessons and other discussions with pupils, for example during tutor periods or assemblies, teachers promote the benefits of democracy as a principle of government. Pupils' understanding is exemplified in the respectful way they listen to and acknowledge contrary opinions, and practically through elections to various representative bodies. Boarding houses and the school are environments where concepts of right and wrong are clear, and pupils naturally respect rules.

41. Careers education is presented during personal development sessions. From Year 9, pupils are given opportunities to explore post-school and post-university opportunities, and some organise their own work experience. Staff responsible provide well-honed, informed and individual advice. Each year, a high proportion of pupils achieve offers of places and scholarships at universities and colleges across the world. However, pupils' involvement with employees and employers is not well developed.

**The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society**

**All the relevant Standards are met.**

## Safeguarding

42. Leaders' approaches to policy, practice and implementation provide an effective approach to safeguarding pupils in their care. Leaders are alert to the contextual safeguarding risks to pupils both on site and in the wider community. They take all reasonable steps to keep pupils safe.
43. Pupils say they feel safe. They receive regular teaching and guidance on staying safe in a range of contexts, including online. There are adults they can go to if they are concerned.
44. Safeguarding leaders react promptly to changes in statutory guidance or advice, by making immediate adjustments to policy and providing training in new procedures for staff. The training of staff is comprehensive. Staff record and report potential issues without delay and in detail. Leaders review and act quickly on these reports.
45. Leaders work closely with relevant safeguarding partners, including external agencies such as children's services. This includes in handling any allegations against adults and referrals to the local authority designated officer. Procedures are followed effectively, and the school follows up actions promptly.
46. Leaders routinely review the impact of the support in place for pupils and evaluate long-term trends. They do this to see where they can be even more effective. Leaders use this information to identify and support the most vulnerable pupils who need additional help and support. They implement effective personalised methods to manage and support these pupils, including by identifying and managing any risks to pupils' welfare.
47. Governors are diligent in ensuring that leaders react systematically to any emerging needs in the school. They have invested in additional staffing to support pupils' wellbeing and digital safety. New arrangements for the monitoring and filtering of online technology are effective. Governors have also commissioned an external review into harmful sexual behaviours and overseen appropriate follow-up actions. Pupils state that the resultant changes to, and profile given to, relationships education means that such incidents are dealt with appropriately and are now very rare.
48. Boarding staff are specifically trained to identify potential concerns. Pupils access a team of well-trained professionals on a day-to-day basis including housemasters, house matrons, senior staff and school counsellors. The independent person is well known to boarders and a further adult that they turn to for support.
49. Leaders have successfully trialled new software which correlates information to enable the identification of pupils whose concerns might otherwise have not surfaced. Senior pupils are trained as "peer-supporters" and successfully work alongside staff to guide younger pupils. The amount of tutor time has been increased to enable greater contact between tutors and pupils.
50. All appropriate pre-employment and recruitment checks are made on adults before they come into contact with pupils. The record of these checks is well-maintained and accurate.

**The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding**

**All the relevant Standards are met.**

## School details

<b>School</b>	Westminster School
<b>Department for Education number</b>	213/6047
<b>Registered charity number</b>	312728
<b>Address</b>	Westminster School Little Dean's Yard London SW1P 3PF
<b>Telephone number</b>	020 7963 1000
<b>Email address</b>	enquiries@westminster.org.uk
<b>Website</b>	www.westminster.org.uk
<b>Proprietor</b>	The Governing Body of Westminster School
<b>Chair</b>	Mr Mark Batten
<b>Headteacher</b>	Dr Gary Savage
<b>Registered charity number</b>	312728
<b>Age range</b>	12 to 19
<b>Number of pupils</b>	769
<b>Number of boarding pupils</b>	183
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	13 to 14 November 2019

## Information about the school

51. Westminster School is a day and boarding school situated within the precincts of Westminster Abbey. Some school buildings and playing fields are located a short distance away. The school educates single sex pupils (male) from the age of 12 to 16. The sixth form is co-educational. The school is a registered charity, overseen by a governing body.
52. The school is situated in and amongst an historical site of international significance. The maintenance of buildings and other school amenities is a collaboration with other bodies.
53. Around a quarter of pupils board in one of six all-age boarding houses. Five of these are on the main site and one a short distance away. One boarding house is for female boarding pupils and male day pupils, and the other five boarding houses are for both male and female day and boarding pupils
54. The school has identified 141 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). A very small proportion of pupils have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
55. English is an additional language for nine pupils.
56. The school states its aims are to cherish, sustain and develop a community of well-rounded scholars who care deeply about the life of the mind and the lives of others; promote kindness, rigour and respect (for themselves, their work and their world) amongst able and ambitious girls and boys; enable pupils to pursue excellence and develop passions inside the classroom, as well as outside in areas such as creative and performing arts, and sport; develop a sense of personal responsibility and resilience, and a genuine commitment to being good friends, neighbours and citizens; equip pupils to lead positive, creative, useful and fulfilling lives characterised by an authentic and lifelong love of learning and of service.

## Inspection details

### Inspection dates

27 to 29 February 2024

57. A team of nine inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

58. Inspection activities included:

- discussions with governors, including the chair of governors
- discussions with the headteacher, senior leaders and other members of staff
- discussions with groups of pupils from a range of year groups
- observation of lessons, some with senior leaders
- visits to boarding houses accompanied by staff and pupils
- visits to learning support areas and facilities for physical education
- scrutiny and discussion of samples of pupils' work alongside pupils and staff
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation, and records provided by the school.

59. The inspection team considered the views of pupils, members of staff and parents who responded to ISI's pre-inspection surveys.



**How are association independent schools in England inspected?**

- The Department for Education is the regulator for independent schools in England.
- ISI is approved by the Secretary of State for Education to inspect independent schools in England, which are members of associations in membership of the Independent Schools Council.
- ISI inspections report to the Department for Education on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards, the EYFS statutory framework requirements, the National Minimum Standards for boarding schools and any other relevant standards are met.
- For more information, please visit **[www.isi.net](http://www.isi.net)**.

**Independent Schools Inspectorate**

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For more information, please visit [isi.net](http://isi.net)