

School inspection report

19 to 21 November 2024

Westminster Under School

27 Vincent Square

London

SW1P 2NN

The Independent Schools Inspectorate is appointed by the Department for Education to inspect association independent schools in England. Our inspections report on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards and other applicable regulatory requirements are met, collectively referred to in this report as 'the Standards'.

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Summary of inspection findings

1. Leaders are effective in promoting the wellbeing of pupils, who feel happy and secure in their school environment. Leaders involve pupils, parents and staff in formulating the school's values, which have a positive impact on pupils' personal development. Governors provide effective oversight. They support and challenge leaders in promoting the school's aims and ensuring the Standards are met.
2. Risks to pupils' welfare are rigorously assessed and addressed. Leaders utilise external expertise appropriately to follow best practice in promoting high standards of health and safety. A thorough process of policy review and training is complemented by an effective self-evaluation process that assesses the impact of policy implementation. Staff with responsibility for health and safety receive suitable training. The health and safety policy is implemented effectively.
3. Leaders enable pupils to experience a broad, challenging curriculum that engenders high levels of interest. Teaching is challenging and is delivered at a pace that supports pupils' rapid acquisition of knowledge, skills and understanding. Appropriate adaptations are made to the curriculum, teaching and learning which enable pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and those who speak English as an additional language (EAL) to access subjects successfully. Pupils make good progress during their time at the school.
4. A significant strength of the school is the enrichment programme available through the wider curriculum. Pupils have ready access to a wide range of lunchtime and after-school clubs, which they strongly support. They participate in a highly inclusive drama, music and sports programme. Pupils with particular aptitudes and interests have many opportunities to deepen their passions through competitions, educational visits and international tours. Pupils' outcomes from the enrichment programme are often exceptional, with success in competitions up to national and sometimes international level.
5. The school is an inclusive community where pupils are happy. They flourish in an environment in which they are well known as individuals and form part of a community in which difference and achievement are both promoted and celebrated. Respect and tolerance are routinely shown towards others. The school's values clearly outline to pupils the characteristics of positive behaviour choices, which they aspire to follow.
6. Pupils' health and safety is vigilantly protected by leaders and monitored closely by governors. Managers with responsibility for the maintenance of the school site, fire safety arrangements, pupils' medical needs, supervision and risk management are suitably qualified and fulfil their responsibilities well. They receive regular and appropriate training.
7. Pupils are effectively prepared for the next stage of their lives. The oldest pupils are well supported in preparing for their senior school examinations and respond positively to opportunities to take on additional responsibilities. However, the guidance pupils in Years 7 and 8 receive on future careers, and the steps they might need to take at school to realise their potential career goals, is not sufficiently developed.

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 pupils in Years 7 and 8 experience a careers education programme that is relevant to their needs and enables them to understand the steps they might need to take to achieve their potential career goals.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

8. Pupils' wellbeing and the school's aims are promoted effectively. Pupils flourish at school due to the positive relationships they enjoy with staff and one another. The challenge and interest they experience through the school's broad curriculum, alongside the teaching they receive, inspires a love of learning.
9. Leaders and governors know the school well. They routinely evaluate its strengths and identify areas that could be developed further. Leaders gain awareness of pupils' school experience through regularly observing lessons, looking at pupils' work and having discussions with pupils in forums such as school council and prefects' meetings. Leaders address pupils' ideas and concerns promptly and effectively. Pupils in Year 8 attend a meeting with the full board of governors at the beginning and end of the academic year to discuss topics relevant to their school experience.
10. The comprehensive self-evaluation process informs school development planning, which supports positive outcomes for pupils. The clearly articulated strategic plan is implemented fully. The school's new values contribute positively towards pupils' personal development.
11. Governors regularly review reports produced by leaders to ensure they are fulfilling their responsibilities effectively in ensuring the Standards are met. Governors scrutinise the school development plan regularly and thoroughly, providing suitable challenge for leaders. Governors undertake regular and effective performance management reviews to assure themselves that leaders have suitable skills and knowledge for their roles.
12. An effective system of review by governors' sub-committees is in place to ensure policies comply with relevant legislation and have regard to applicable guidance. Governors visit the school to assess the impact of policy implementation on pupils' school experience. Policies are understood by staff and pupils and implemented effectively.
13. Leaders effectively identify, assess and mitigate risks, with rigorous oversight provided by a health and safety committee. Staff receive appropriate training in the management of risks. Rigorous risk assessments are undertaken, including as part of leaders' planning of the school's extensive international travel arrangements. Contextual risks associated with the school's location in central London are carefully considered and addressed.
14. Leaders utilise expertise appropriately from external agencies when supporting pupils' health and safety, welfare and educational outcomes. Regular fire safety and electrical checks are undertaken by appropriately qualified professionals.
15. Leaders provide the information that is required by parents and external agencies, including key policies and an annual parents' handbook containing helpful information about their child's school year. Parents are provided with regular feedback about pupils' educational attainment, progress and personal development through written reports and verbal feedback at parents' evenings. The school informs the local authority regarding the use of funds and shares information about pupils who have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
16. The complaints policy can be accessed from the school's website. Leaders follow the procedure outlined in the policy when investigating concerns or complaints that arise. Leaders and governors regularly review concerns and complaints to consider what lessons might be learnt.

17. The requirements of the Equality Act 2010 are met. A comprehensive accessibility plan is in place and implemented fully. The sports department has introduced wheelchair basketball for all pupils, with and without a disability, to enable non-disabled pupils to understand the impact of disability and promote greater inclusion for pupils with a disability.

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

18. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

19. Pupils' wide-ranging interests are catered for by a broad and challenging curriculum. The subjects pupils study engage their interest, supporting their good progress. This enables them to acquire a broad and deeply embedded range of skills and knowledge across linguistic, mathematical and scientific subjects. Pupils benefit greatly from the range and quality of learning opportunities available to them in aesthetic, creative and physical aspects of the curriculum.
20. Teachers' enthusiasm for, and expertise in their subjects engages pupils' interest, enabling them to make good progress. Pupils' mathematical capabilities are challenged both in lessons and within wider curriculum experiences, resulting in strong outcomes. For example, many pupils achieve awards when entered for national mathematics competitions. Teachers' knowledge and expertise enables pupils to become highly proficient in their use of spoken and written English. They learn to analyse reading material and use challenging language to compare and contrast the similarities and differences in texts. For example, pupils study the way stories are reported in different newspapers to develop their understanding of the power of language.
21. Teachers skilfully adapt the questions they ask to meet pupils' individual needs and interests. High levels of challenge feed pupils' thirst for knowledge. The use of high-quality resources supports learning well. For example, pupils make effective use of the school's library, regularly borrowing copious numbers of high-quality books suited to their age and ability. Pupils' experience well-chosen, stimulating activities that extend their thinking. The high quality of teaching and learning results in pupils routinely gaining places at academically selective senior schools.
22. Leaders and managers carefully track pupils' progress, identifying gaps in understanding and making appropriate adjustments in order that pupils can fully understand what they are learning. Teachers provide helpful guidance to pupils which helps them to address gaps in their knowledge, skills and understanding.
23. Pupils who have SEND are carefully assessed, using external expertise when required. The measures that are put in place to support their needs enable them to make good progress. 'Pupil passports' are used effectively to closely track pupils' progress and to make adjustments to teaching and learning when required.
24. Pupils who speak EAL receive effective individual and group support which helps them to rapidly acquire language skills. Regular and effective sharing of suitable language acquisition strategies between teachers, pupils and parents supports pupils who speak EAL to make good progress.
25. The quality and range of the school's wider curriculum provision is notably strong. Pupils' skills, understanding and enthusiasm are deepened through a diverse range of 'extras' such as breakdancing, bridge, chess, parkour and robotics clubs. There is a high level of inclusion and participation in activities beyond the classroom. All pupils have opportunities to perform in drama productions, musical ensembles and sports teams. During the inspection, pupils in Years 7 and 8 performed with enthusiasm and confidence on stage in *The Playhouse Apprentice*, whilst others undertook backstage roles.
26. Pupils with particular enthusiasm or talent enter competitions, up to national and sometimes international level. This year, pupils have won national competitions in science, history, geography, robotics, tennis, swimming and chess. Pupils benefit from high quality coaching, such as that given

by the three grandmasters who supported the chess team in reaching the under-19s national finals. Residential visits, both within the United Kingdom and internationally, such as musical tours of Italy and Germany and a geography expedition to Iceland, further enhance pupils' educational experience. Pupils benefit from the school's location in central London. For example, pupils have exhibited artwork at public exhibitions whilst the choir has performed in Westminster Abbey and at the Barbican.

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

27. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

28. Pupils feel happy and secure at school due to staff's individualised understanding of their needs. There is a culture of inclusivity and kindness that underpins the school's values, which pupils actively seek to implement. Pupils exhibit high levels of self-esteem and self-confidence, which is bolstered by the many opportunities they have to perform in concerts, drama productions, debates and matches, in addition to the celebration of their achievements in assemblies and newsletters.
29. Mental health concerns are addressed promptly due to the vigilance of staff and their prompt interventions. Suitable assistance is provided by the school counsellor and therapy dog who support pupils experiencing anxiety, such as when preparing for senior school entrance exams. Pupils who are involved in a wide range of curriculum enrichment activities are helped by staff to manage their workload.
30. Pupils' personal development is well supported by an appropriate personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) curriculum which is delivered effectively. Pupils learn about the positive impact of a healthy lifestyle in science and PSHE lessons. A comprehensive and inclusive sports programme engenders a positive view of physical exercise. It enables pupils to develop skills and enthusiasm for a variety of sports due to the expertise and quality of the coaching. Nutritious food choices are available at lunchtimes and are often selected by pupils.
31. The relationships and sex education (RSE) curriculum helps pupils to understand how to foster healthy relationships. This is reinforced by the values promoted by staff and 'values ambassadors'. Pupils receive appropriate guidance about their changing bodies and sex education in RSE lessons.
32. Pupils' spiritual understanding is developed through theology, philosophy and religion lessons, assemblies and church services. Pupils appreciate the regular opportunities they have for quiet reflection in a local church. They learn that academic outcomes are not the only measure of success and that respectful relationships and service towards others contribute towards spiritual wellbeing and growth.
33. Respect and tolerance towards others is regularly championed. People's differences are recognised and celebrated by both pupils and staff when they speak about their personal experiences in assemblies. Pupils speak to different audiences about the diversity of their cultural backgrounds, such as in a pupil-led history talk about southern India and an assembly celebrating Nigerian culture.
34. Pupils behave well in their classrooms, at breaktimes and between lessons. They are motivated by the way the school rewards positive behaviour and view the application of the sanctions policy as fair. Pupils learn to recognise bullying behaviour and to understand that it can occur both in-person and online. On the rare occasions that bullying occurs, it is addressed promptly and effectively by staff.
35. The school premises are maintained to a high standard. Facilities are appropriate to pupils' needs. Pupils benefit from easy access to high quality sports and breaktime facilities. Any health and safety issues that are identified are addressed swiftly and effectively. Fire safety arrangements are effective. Fire drills take place regularly and are appropriately evaluated to identify if there any points for improvement.

36. Pupils are supervised appropriately. Supervision of pupils is vigilant on the school site, when crossing the road to use the school's sports ground and when walking to church.
37. Arrangements for first aid and the management of pupils' medical needs are suitable. Staff receive appropriate first aid training which enables them to provide suitable support for pupils both on site and when undertaking activities further afield.
38. Attendance and admission registers are maintained appropriately. The local authority is informed when pupils join or leave the school other than at the beginning or end of the school year. Attendance rates are above the national average. Leaders take prompt and effective action in response to absences.

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

- 39. All the relevant Standards are met.**

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

40. Pupils have a well-developed appreciation of the differences between people, which they gain through lessons, assemblies and visiting speakers. They participate in diversity and inclusion awareness days, such as in Black History Month and International Women's Day. Tolerance and mutual respect of different viewpoints is promoted across subjects, such as in PSHE lessons when pupils discuss the importance of respect in forging secure relationships.
41. The school's aim 'to serve others' is promoted effectively. Pupils embrace opportunities to take on positions of responsibility which are seen as meaningful and rewarding. Pupils regularly participate in projects to help the local community which helps them both give service to others and gain valuable insights into other people's lives. This includes regular visits to residents in a care home and supporting pupils in a local primary school with their reading. Pupils regularly raise money for a variety of charities, including a homelessness charity and a prosthetic limbs charity, through activities such as the annual summer term fete.
42. Positive social skills are promoted and effective guidance is given to help pupils resolve conflicts. Pupils were involved in the development of the school's new values and are proud to be appointed as 'values ambassadors'. Pupils are taught about the importance of laws and the potential consequences of breaking them. They also learn about the responsibility people have, both individually and collectively, in the way in which they exercise personal freedoms. Pupils develop a strong understanding of these key aspects of society, which helps to prepare them for life in British society.
43. Pupils experience democratic processes first-hand through elections to bodies such as the school council and voting for charities to support. An understanding of how Britain is governed is developed through mock elections. The school's proximity to the Houses of Parliament enables regular visits in which pupils learn about democratic government.
44. Pupils gain a clear understanding of how to make effective financial decisions. Pupils learn useful lessons about personal finance management and budgeting in PSHE lessons. Junior school pupils learn about prioritising how to spend their replica Euros when purchasing food items during a French breakfast at school. Older pupils apply lessons learnt in budgeting when managing their own money during overseas trips.
45. Pupils are well supported in preparing for key changes in their lives. Pupils in Year 3 are integrated swiftly into the school due to the regular support they receive from their 'house families' and school prefects. Prefects are given duties which are appropriate to their age and stage of development. Pupils in Year 8 are well prepared for their senior school examinations. Pupils in Years 7 and 8 do not experience a careers education programme that is sufficiently relevant to their needs and which helps them to understand the steps they might need to take to achieve their potential career goals.

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

46. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

47. Governors support leaders in providing effective oversight of the school's safeguarding arrangements. Safeguarding policy and practice are in line with statutory requirements. The governor with designated responsibility for safeguarding undertakes regular visits to the school to evaluate the effectiveness with which the safeguarding policy is implemented. The safeguarding governor produces termly safeguarding reports which are discussed by the governing body. Suitable challenge and support is provided for the school's safeguarding team. Leaders ensure that safeguarding is an important part of the risk management process.
48. Leaders with responsibility for safeguarding have suitable experience, training and status within the school and fulfil their responsibilities effectively. Designated safeguarding leaders liaise in an appropriate and timely manner with external agencies. They attend local authority training which enables them to understand thresholds for reporting concerns.
49. All staff, volunteers and governors receive appropriate safeguarding training, including as part of their induction to their respective roles. Safeguarding leaders and external experts provide regular updates to staff throughout the year. Staff are vigilant and alert to possible signs of abuse or neglect. They report their concerns promptly and safeguarding leaders take timely and appropriate action in response.
50. Pupils are taught how to stay safe and how to share safeguarding concerns. Photographs of the school's safeguarding leaders and contact details of national child support helplines are displayed prominently around the school site. Pupils report concerns by speaking to staff members, whom they trust. Pupils know that they will be listened to sympathetically and their concerns addressed effectively.
51. Regular guidance is provided to pupils in computing lessons and talks are given by external experts as to how to stay safe online. Parents receive helpful guidance from safeguarding leaders about how they can support online safety. Leaders intervene promptly when potential issues are identified by the school's internet filtering system.
52. Managers of the school's recruitment processes possess the necessary expertise and training and fulfil their responsibilities effectively. Leaders provide rigorous and regular oversight of the school's single central record of appointments, which is completed in line with statutory guidance.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

- 53. All the relevant Standards are met.**

School details

School	Westminster Under School
Department for Education number	213/6182
Registered charity number	312728
Address	Westminster Under School 27 Vincent Square London SW1P 2NN
Phone number	020 7821 5788
Email address	sammy.pearce@westminster.co.uk
Website	www.westminster.org.uk
Proprietor	The governing body of Westminster School
Chair	Mr Mark Batten
Headteacher	Mrs Kate Jefferson
Age range	7 to 13
Number of pupils	277
Date of previous inspection	October 2021

Information about the school

54. Westminster Under School is an independent day preparatory school for boys aged 7 to 13 years in Westminster, London. The school is a registered charity and shares governance arrangements with Westminster School, which is located nearby.
55. The school has identified 26 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). A very small proportion of pupils in the school has an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
56. English is an additional language for 175 pupils.
57. The school states its aim is to inspire in its pupils a love of learning, an ability to question and a desire to serve others.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

19 to 21 November 2024

58. A team of three inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

59. Inspection activities included:

- observation of lessons, some in conjunction with school leaders
- observation of registration periods and assemblies
- observation of a sample of extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection
- discussions with the chair and other governors
- discussions with the headteacher, school leaders, managers and other members of staff
- discussions with pupils
- visits to the learning support area and facilities for physical education
- scrutiny of samples of pupils' work
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

60. 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**.

Independent Schools Inspectorate

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For more information, please visit isi.net