



INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

WESTMINSTER UNDER SCHOOL

STANDARD INSPECTION

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

Westminster Under School

Full Name of School	Westminster Under School
DfE Number	213/6182
Registered Charity Number	312728
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Master	Mrs Elizabeth Hill
Chair of Westminster School Governors	The Very Revd Dr J R Hall Dean of Westminster
Chair of Under School Committee	Mr Tony Willoughby
Age Range	7 to 13
Total Number of Pupils	262
Gender of Pupils	Boys
Numbers by Age	7-11: 144 11-13: 118
Inspection dates	29 Mar 2011 to 30 Mar 2011 04 May 2011 to 06 May 2011

PREFACE

This inspection report follows the STANDARD *ISI schedule*. The inspection consists of two parts: an INITIAL two-day inspection of regulatory requirements followed by a three-day FINAL (team) inspection of the school's broader educational provision. The previous ISI inspection was in February 2005.

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is the body approved by the Government for the purpose of inspecting schools belonging to the 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 Standards 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.

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 Westminister Under School is a day school for boys aged seven to thirteen years. Located in central London, it was founded in 1943 as a class of seventeen boys, accommodated at Westminster School. It subsequently moved to its own premises and then to its current location in 1981. Its governing structure is defined by the Charter for Westminster School, with which governance is shared. A sub-committee of the full governing body directly oversees the work of the school.
- 1.2 The school aims to promote a caring community which fosters in the boys a love of learning and an enthusiasm for life, so that they can be active participants in their lessons and activities. It seeks to encourage boys to think for themselves, engage fully in discussion and take pride in their work. It aims to enable the boys to realise their abilities and qualities as individuals and members of the school community and to ensure that transition to senior school is as smooth as possible.
- 1.3 The school is academically selective. The main points of admission are at the ages of seven, eight and eleven following tests in English, mathematics and reasoning. At the age of thirteen, the majority of boys move on to the Great School (Westminster School), the remainder to other selective schools, some achieving scholarships. Results in standardised tests in verbal reasoning indicate that the ability profile of the school is far above the national average. All pupils are of at least above average ability, with over a third having an ability that is far above average.
- 1.4 At the time of inspection there were 262 boys on roll. The school population reflects the international professional community of the City of London. Boys represent a range of social and ethnic backgrounds with increasing diversity following the 11+ intake from primary schools into Year 7. There are no boys for whom English is an additional language (EAL). Fifteen boys have been identified as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD). They receive specialist learning support from the school. Other pupils receive support to develop their study skills. One boy has a statement of special educational needs (SEN).
- 1.5 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school.

2. THE SUCCESS OF THE SCHOOL

2.(a) Main findings

- 2.1 A balanced curriculum, which continues to be developed, a wide range of extra-curricular activities and lively, challenging and interesting teaching ensure that boys are highly successful in their learning. Their overall achievement is outstanding. The school is successful in meeting its aim to provide a stimulating and supportive environment which enables boys to fulfil their potential. Highly developed literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills contribute significantly to the boys' outstanding progress. Personal, social and health education (PSHE) has been recently introduced and is in the early stages of development. Excellent behaviour, positive attitudes and a close rapport with staff are the cornerstones of the boys' success. Educational visits and further experiences outside of the classroom, organised by the committed and high-quality staff further enhance the curricular provision. Assessment systems provide informative data but these are not readily available to support planning and teaching. Boys' understanding is promoted by highly effective use of ICT in teaching, adding to their enjoyment.
- 2.2 The quality of personal development is excellent. Strong relationships between staff and boys promote a love of learning and enthusiasm for life. Boys develop outstanding personal qualities; they speak, reason and think confidently. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness is excellent. Welfare, health and safety are excellent. Staff provide a very supportive environment and strongly support the boys' needs. Measures to promote good behaviour and guard against bullying are successful. Arrangements for the boys' safeguarding are secure. Carefully followed recruitment procedures ensure the appointment of suitable staff. A committee monitors health and safety closely and ensures safety on off-site visits. Boys understand the importance of regular exercise and healthy eating.
- 2.3 Governance is outstanding. Governors gain an excellent overview of the school, drawing well on their broad experience and on non-governor members who bring specific expertise. Governors have a well-informed insight into the school and monitor it highly effectively, ensuring that their responsibilities for health and safety and safeguarding are fulfilled. Excellent leadership and management at all levels provide effective oversight of pastoral and academic provision. The school development plan is emerging, consultation being the key element in planning for the future. Managers ensure that staff are dedicated and motivated and that policies are effective in ensuring boys' welfare. The quality of links with parents is excellent in supporting the schools' aims. The school values its communication with parents and seeks their views through a variety of means. Parents are welcome at the school and attend a range of events; any concerns are quickly managed.

2.(b) Action points

(i) Compliance with regulatory requirements

(The range of the Independent School Standards Regulations is given in the Preface)

- 2.4 At the time of the initial visit, the school met all the requirements of the Independent School Standards Regulations 2010.

(ii) Recommendations for further improvement

- 2.5 In order to build further on its evident high standards, the school is advised to make the following improvements.
1. Complete the process of consultation to ensure the creation of a well-focused strategic plan to drive and monitor future development.
 2. Complete the developments to raise the profile of PSHE, both within and beyond the curriculum, as a firm foundation for boys' personal development.
 3. Ensure effective use of the data collected for tracking and analysing progress by devising a system to make it more accessible to staff to support planning and teaching.

3. THE QUALITY OF ACADEMIC AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS

3.(a) The quality of the pupils' achievements and their learning, attitudes and skills

- 3.1 The overall achievement of the boys is outstanding. This is in line with the school's aims to provide high-quality education in a happy and stimulating environment. The school has improved upon the very good standards reached at the previous inspection.
- 3.2 At all stages boys demonstrate consistently high levels of knowledge and understanding and display excellent literacy and numeracy skills. Their reasoning skills and creative thinking develop to a high standard. In a science lesson, for example, boys predicted results accurately from practical investigations and explained cogently how they came to their conclusions when considering how the pulse rate increases with vigorous exercise. Boys are confident and articulate in discussion with each other and adults. They achieve high levels of competence in ICT, skills which they use productively in other subjects, both for research and recording. Excellent collaborative learning was evident when boys were scrutinising sources to determine if Oliver Cromwell was a villain or hero. The outstanding level of musical talent, shown by many boys, has been recognised both regionally and nationally in competitions, concerts and the high level of success in instrumental music examinations. Achievement in art is high, as seen in success in national competitions. Regular involvement in sporting activities, such as rugby, football, cricket, basketball and hockey, enables all boys to have a healthy lifestyle and a sense of achievement. Excellence in regular dramatic performances, which are both demanding and stimulating, strongly fosters the boys' confidence.
- 3.3 The boys' overall attainment cannot be measured in relation to average performance against a fixed norm but, on the evidence available, it is judged to be excellent in relation to national age-related expectations. At the age of thirteen, boys gain entry to highly selective independent schools, gaining a large number of scholarships and exhibitions. Their excellent achievements are clearly facilitated by the demanding breadth and challenge of the curriculum, as well as a sensitive pastoral support network. They rise to the challenge of high expectations from the staff with enjoyment and enthusiasm. This level of attainment, as judged, indicates that boys make exceptional progress relative to the average for pupils of similar ability, those with LDD receiving appropriate assistance in a swift and sensitive manner, and those who are gifted and talented being challenged at an appropriately high level.
- 3.4 Boys have an excellent attitude towards learning, which enables their significant progress. They thrive in an environment of hard work, enjoyment and effort. They relish being challenged as seen, for example, in their keen participation in the 'Maths Problem of the Week', which sets interesting problems for boys to solve. Most boys sustain high levels of concentration and motivation, enabling them to maintain consistently high levels of performance.

3.(b) The contribution of curricular and extra-curricular provision (including community links of benefit to pupils)

- 3.5 The school's curriculum and its provision of an extra-curricular programme are outstanding. They provide both a high-quality and a broad-based education which have a positive effect upon each boy's personal development and achievement. All boys are encouraged to strive for intellectual, social and physical development. The school has built further on the standards noted at the previous inspection.
- 3.6 The broad, balanced and challenging curriculum is greatly enjoyed by the boys. Creative use of high-quality resources and facilities enables boys to learn effectively in a demanding range of subjects which has been extended recently to include Japanese and PSHE, the latter being still in the early stages of development. Building developments, which are currently in progress, are intended to provide improved facilities for art and dining in a new building and thus realise additional space in the existing accommodation. The extensive use of ICT in the curriculum enhances the boys' learning, enabling them, for example, to access and record data.
- 3.7 The curriculum meets the needs of boys of all abilities. It includes a flexible approach to specialist support for those with LDD and rigorous challenge for the most able. In a mathematics class, for example, boys were encouraged to find a range of methods to resolve a problem. The curriculum is well organised and is carefully monitored to ensure continuity of approach and an awareness of different needs. Boys due to join the school in Year 7 and just embarking on language learning, for example, attend extra French and Latin classes on a Saturday before the new school year begins.
- 3.8 The curriculum is enriched by educational visits, which are both day and residential. These visits help to extend the boys' learning and experience. Year 3, for example, were looking forward to going to a Victorian school, dressed as school children of the era, and the senior choir were thrilled on their recent return from a tour of China, having sung in Chinese and learnt about different cultures and customs whilst entertaining new audiences. A regular French exchange encourages boys to learn the language in the natural setting. Geography field trips to places such as Dorset and the Lake District enable boys to produce independent research projects.
- 3.9 Boys benefit from an excellent extra-curricular activities programme. Throughout the school they benefit from participation in activities of their choice beyond the curriculum, providing a rich variety of learning experiences. For example, boys can join in fencing or go to a wide range of musical ensembles. The extensive range of instrumental tuition, provided by the excellent team of peripatetic staff, is matched by the enthusiasm of the boys who flock to participate.
- 3.10 Whole-school charity fund-raising projects enable boys to develop an appreciation of others. Raising funds for charitable concerns, such as the homeless, flooding in Pakistan and war refugees in Rwanda, not only helps others, but engages the boys in considering their world and their place within it.

3.(c) The contribution of teaching

- 3.11 The quality of teaching is excellent and has strengthened further since the previous inspection. It rigorously supports the aims of the school to encourage boys to think for themselves and to realise their abilities and qualities as individuals. It also ensures that transition to senior school is as smooth as possible. Teaching allows boys of all abilities to make progress and actively promotes discovery and independent learning. It is a particularly strong contributor to their high achievement. A class who were studying water, for example, discovered that soap reacts to different types of water in a variety of ways. Teaching effectively encourages boys to work both independently and collaboratively. It promotes excitement, debate, considered thought and moments of inspiration. The outstanding teaching observed was characterised by excellent preparation, an appropriately brisk pace to the lesson and challenging work, often with a keen sense of humour. Boys are strongly encouraged to reason and to apply this to their learning to develop ideas which are taken seriously and valued. Depth of subject knowledge, evident in the specialist teaching, strongly underpins the quality of teaching.
- 3.12 Teaching demonstrates high and realistic expectations. Boys are consistently encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning and to apply themselves diligently in every situation. Carefully managed questioning challenges the boys' thinking and thereby promotes understanding. The boys' thirst for knowledge is seized upon and developed with skill, with high expectations of behaviour. The rapport between the boys and their teachers is a significant feature as the teachers understand their needs and engage in lively debate. The close partnership between boys and staff extends to providing support in an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect. Regular praise and encouragement of the boys is a feature of teaching, the boys responding appropriately. Cross-curricular links are carefully planned; a class registration, for example, was undertaken in a new language, Polish, with Japanese having featured the previous week.
- 3.13 Detailed assessment systems record boys' attainment effectively. However, the data are not currently easily available to staff for use in planning and teaching. The school has plans to deal with this. There is some inconsistency in the quality of written comments in marking. However, teaching often provides the boys with detailed individual oral feedback, engaging them in discussion about improving their work. A Year 5 class, who scored very highly in a mathematics test, were carefully shown that not reading a question thoroughly before beginning could lead to careless errors. The careful use of self-assessment and discussions with a partner enables boys to learn together. Teaching is often enhanced by skilful use of ICT, which adds to the boys' enjoyment.

4. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

4.(a) The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

- 4.1 The quality of boys' personal development is excellent, maintaining the standards noted at the previous inspection and reflecting the school's ethos and commitment to high-quality pastoral care. Strong relationships fully support the boys' personal development and reflect the school's aims of promoting a caring community which fosters a love of learning and an enthusiasm for life, so that they can be active participants in lessons and activities. Boys develop outstanding qualities, notably in their ability to speak confidently, think and reflect. The PSHE course is still evolving, but boys regularly discuss and learn about PSHE-related topics, both within and beyond the main curriculum.
- 4.2 Spiritual development is excellent, assemblies and the weekly church service playing an important role in this; the choir's anthem was an extremely moving spiritual experience. Friendly and respectful relationships are developed at all levels of the school. High-quality artwork, which is acknowledged and displayed around the school, deepens boys' spiritual awareness and provides a sense of awe and wonder. High levels of self-confidence and self-esteem enable boys to participate confidently in lessons and demonstrate their appreciation of art, music and drama.
- 4.3 The boys' moral development is very strong and results from the example set by the staff and their high expectations of good conduct. Assemblies, form time and PSHE lessons promote efficiently a good understanding of right and wrong. For example, the boys' understanding of the need to respect differences and avoid prejudice developed through discussion in a PSHE lesson, picking up the theme of the address in the morning's church service. Boys expressed, in a very personal way, their understanding of the moral element in the lesson. They regularly engage in a sensitive discussion of moral issues, such as poverty, behind the subject matter of a lesson.
- 4.4 Social awareness is excellent. Their manners are good and they are confident and outgoing, often seeking posts of responsibility such as form captain or school council representative. Through the school council they gain an understanding of working for the whole school community, for example, suggesting changes to the type of bread offered at lunch time and discussing new playground equipment. They take responsibility for proposing, and talking to other boys in assemblies about, possible charities to support. They take seriously their concern for those less fortunate than themselves. They recycle paper and show a care for the environment; two boys in each class are named 'green ambassadors' and actively promote environmental issues, using the notice board designated for this purpose.
- 4.5 The boys' cultural development is of a very high quality. They benefit strongly from their proximity to the cultural amenities of Central London. A wide range of trips, both locally and abroad enhances the boys' awareness of foreign cultures and ways of life. Many boys extend their cultural awareness through a high level of participation in musical ensembles. They visit art galleries and wonder at the actual pictures they have been studying in art lessons; in a music lesson they broadened their understanding through placing brass instruments into their historical context. In a classics lesson, they displayed an excellent knowledge of classical myths and legends. The international nature of the school population and the local area ensures that the boys develop an excellent awareness of cultural diversity.

4.(b) The contribution of arrangements for welfare, health and safety

- 4.6 Arrangements for the welfare, health and safety of the boys are excellent and have strengthened further since the last inspection, ensuring that the school meets its aim to provide a caring community. Staff provide a very supportive environment, founded on a clear understanding of health and safety requirements and boys' individual needs.
- 4.7 Carefully considered measures successfully provide watchful pastoral and academic support as boys join, progress through and move on from the school. Meetings with staff at the Great School, for example, enable the successful transfer of information as boys change schools. Excellent relationships between staff and pupils and amongst the pupils themselves are fundamental to the boys' welfare and safety; staff give readily and generously of their time to support the boys' individually in their work, progress and welfare needs. The school's measures to promote good behaviour and deal with unacceptable behaviour, should it occur, are thorough and effective; a system for rewarding good work and behaviour is a successful motivational element in the life of the school. The school's measures to guard against bullying are successful and are well supported by additional, informative leaflets for boys and their parents.
- 4.8 Arrangements for the safeguarding of pupils are secure and benefit from good liaison between designated officers at the Under School and the Great School. Staff have undertaken appropriate child protection training, which is also a particular focus of the induction of new staff. Several staff have undertaken safer recruitment training and ensure that appropriate recruitment procedures are followed, including particularly detailed maintenance of the central register of appointments.
- 4.9 All necessary measures are taken to reduce risk from fire and other hazards, the school benefiting from excellent support from central estates and bursarial staff. Fire detection and prevention equipment is duly checked and evacuation drills are regular and varied. They are recorded systematically and any necessary action is undertaken and annotated. Health and safety measures are very secure and benefit from a high level of staff awareness. Appropriate testing of equipment and proper precautions in specialist areas, such as science laboratories, strongly promote a safe working environment. Any matters of concern are efficiently reported to the health and safety committee, which monitors health and safety closely and ensures a well-considered focus on risk assessment. A detailed policy and the experience and vigilance of staff ensure the boys' safety on off-site visits.
- 4.10 The school's disability access plan is sufficiently detailed and ensures due provision for those with difficulties or disabilities. Pupils are consistently encouraged to be healthy and gain a good understanding of the importance of regular exercise. Meals are balanced and healthy and the curriculum provides an appropriate focus on healthy eating. The admission register is extremely well-maintained and attendance registers are completed appropriately.

5. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

5.(a) The quality of governance

- 5.1 The governance of the school is outstanding, sustaining the standards noted at the previous inspection. Governors gain an excellent overview of the school and ensure that it meets its aims. The Under School Committee, which has responsibility for the school's governance, is strongly supported by the full board of governors of Westminster School and by its other committees. Governance draws well on the broad experience of the full board in providing a detailed oversight of the school. This is further enhanced by the appointment of non-governor members to the committees, who bring specific expertise in areas such as education, finance and spirituality.
- 5.2 The wide range of backgrounds and skills of the governors contributes significantly to a well-informed insight into the life of the school. This is successfully achieved through termly meetings of both the Under School Committee and the full board and an annual supplementary meeting which provides a focus on a single key issue. Under School Committee members extend their understanding of the school further through monitoring the school's academic record and other school data, attendance at school events, presentations at meetings from a member of staff on a particular educational topic, the Master's written reports and their regular days spent in school, which include informal meetings with staff, and are planned carefully to ensure broad curriculum coverage and an early opportunity to meet new staff.
- 5.3 A governor has responsibility for overseeing child protection matters and undertakes an annual review, reporting to both the Under School Committee and the Executive Committee. In ensuring that their responsibility for the welfare, health and safety of those at the school are fulfilled, governors are well supported by the contracting of external advisors as appropriate.

5.(b) The quality of leadership and management

- 5.4 Leadership and management are excellent. The very good standards observed in the previous inspection have been further improved. The Master and the senior management team work successfully together, providing effective oversight of pastoral and academic provision and embracing consultation as a key element in planning for the future. They share their vision with the school community and value boys' views on a range of issues. Actions at all levels of management firmly support the school aims to support boys as they learn to think for themselves and engage fully in discussion and take pride in their work.
- 5.5 Management at all levels demonstrates an excellent understanding of the strengths and needs of the school, with a particular focus on ensuring and improving the well-being of each boy. Leadership ensures that strong relationships between staff and boys, together with highly motivated and dedicated teaching provide the best for the boys, in both their personal and academic development. Progress is closely monitored through regular discussions, ensuring that boys are coping well with their academic work, are happy and that their individual needs are met.
- 5.6 The creation of a school development plan was a recommendation of the previous inspection. Plans created following that inspection have not been fully revised since then. The current leadership's strategic view is not yet embodied within a school

development plan since, in the first year of the new Master's appointment, the school's leadership is rightly focused on fostering widespread consultation on various aspects of school life, prior to committing targets to paper. It is therefore an emerging document. Some of the vision has already been realised, such as the purchase and development of an additional school building. Well-considered strategic plans for changes to management structures, due to be introduced in the new academic year, are carefully designed to combine and improve the pastoral and academic oversight of the boys. These plans arise from effective consultation, review and reflection.

- 5.7 Arrangements for the appraisal of staff are thorough. Staff attend in-service training to meet personal professional needs and those of the school. Whole school staff development focuses well on a range of topics, particularly the boys' welfare, with training in first aid and PSHE. Secure oversight of school policies is evident, notably those which relate to boys' welfare, health and safety. The leadership team liaises most successfully with the personnel department at the Great School to ensure the recruitment of suitable staff. Leaders and managers at all levels have a good rapport with governors; a staff liaison governor is in regular communication with the school, ensuring strong communication between the school and the governing body. The school also benefits from an efficient and hard-working administrative team.

5.(c) The quality of links with parents, carers and guardians

- 5.8 The quality of links with parents, carers and guardians is excellent and has improved since the last inspection. It strongly supports the academic and personal development aims of the school. In their responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire, parents expressed their high level of satisfaction with the quality of education their children receive. A minority of parents expressed concerns regarding the recent development of PSHE. Inspectors considered the concerns in detail and found no evidence to support them. They concurred with the school's view that it is an important focus for curricular and pastoral development. Parents were particularly pleased with their children's progress and the range of subjects available. They offered particular praise for the school's communication with parents and its promotion of worthwhile attitudes and views.
- 5.9 The school values the views of parents and has actively and effectively sought ways of improving communication. Parents enjoy good contact with the school staff, through the boys' homework diaries, which are an effective means of communication; parents may also contact the study skills department if they are concerned about an aspect of their son's work. Parents are kept well informed through newsletters, parents' evenings, regular effort and achievement grade cards and twice yearly informative reports. Parents of new boys gain helpful insight into the ethos and expectations of the school at an introductory meeting at the start of the academic year. Themed workshops provide parents with a better understanding of particular aspects of education or the school. Parents are welcome to the school on many occasions; they help on school trips, attend concerts and plays, run a book shop and organise the Christmas Fair, in which boys are also invited to take part. Parent class representatives play an active role in co-ordinating events for the benefit of the boys and meet termly with the Master.
- 5.10 Good, helpful information is available for prospective and current parents. The school website and prospectus inform prospective parents of what the school has to offer. Current parents can access the parental section of the school's intranet and an effective means of communication is provided by an electronic messaging

system. Parents' concerns are dealt with swiftly and effectively; the school's complaints procedure is readily available and meets requirements.

What the school should do to improve is given at the beginning of the report in section 2.

INSPECTION EVIDENCE

The inspectors observed lessons, conducted formal interviews with boys and examined samples of their work. They held discussions with members of staff, central bursarial staff, with the chairman of the governors' Under School committee and other committee members, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended registration sessions and assemblies. Inspectors visited the facilities for sick or injured boys. The responses of parents and boys to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined regulatory documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Mr Christopher Sanderson

Reporting Inspector

Mrs Barbara Ottley

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