

The American School in London

1 Waverley Place, London, NW8 0NP

Inspection dates 19–21 February 2013

Overall effectiveness	Outstanding	1
Pupils' achievement	Outstanding	1
Pupils' behaviour and personal development	Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching	Outstanding	1
Quality of curriculum	Outstanding	1
Pupils' welfare, health and safety	Outstanding	1
Leadership and management	Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings

This school is outstanding

- The quality of teaching is outstanding. Teachers make sure that lessons are varied and interesting and, in almost all instances, address the needs of students exceptionally well. Students concentrate extremely well. They are keen to succeed and make exceptional progress during their time in school.
 - Students with particular needs, including those with special educational needs, are supported outstandingly well. They make excellent progress, so there is little difference between how well they achieve and others.
 - The curriculum is excellent. It offers breadth and depth. It is enhanced by a wide range of enrichment activities.
 - Students' achievement is high. Almost all students make outstanding progress and reach high standards in public examinations, which are significantly higher when compared to other schools nationally. As a result, they are extremely well prepared for the next stage of their education, training and employment.
 - Students' behaviour is exemplary. Students act responsibly in lessons and around the school. They are articulate, polite and courteous and display exceptional levels of care for one another.
 - Students are cared for exceptionally well. They are happy and confident. They have an excellent understanding of how to keep themselves safe.
- The school meets schedule 1 of The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, as amended by The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2012 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was carried out with half a day’s notice. Inspectors observed 45 lessons taught by 45 teachers, 19 of which were observed jointly with senior leaders.
- Meetings were held with students, the Chair of Trustees and school leaders. The inspectors observed the school’s work, heard students read and scrutinised documentation.
- The views of parents and carers were taken into account through the 280 responses to the on-line Parent View survey.
- Staff views were taken into consideration through scrutiny of questionnaires completed by 207 staff members.

Inspection team

Ann Henderson, Lead inspector	Her Majesty’s Inspector
Susan Jackson	Additional Inspector
Michele Massaoudi	Additional Inspector
Jerome Freeman	Additional Inspector
Nathaniel Lieberman	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The American School in London's stated aim is to 'develop the intellect and character of each student by providing an outstanding American education with a global perspective'.
- The school was founded in 1951. It is an important educational and cultural centre for American families in London. It is an independent day school for boys and girls. There are 1,354 students aged between four and 18 years. While many students are American, more than 50 nationalities are represented in the student body. A small number have a statement of special educational needs. There is no alternative provision used by the school.
- The school follows an American curriculum and is structured into three departments: lower, middle and high schools.
- The school was last inspected in 2009.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that teachers address the needs of the very few middle- and lower-ability students who are currently making good rather than outstanding progress.
- Improve leaders' and managers' understanding of the school even more by producing and reporting on an overview of students' progress as a whole.

Inspection judgements

Pupils' achievement

Outstanding

Students' achievement is outstanding. As students move through the school, almost all students continue to make rapid progress. Almost all make exceptional progress from their varying starting points because the opportunities provided excite and engage them in learning. However, in the middle and high schools a very few middle- and lower-ability students make good rather than outstanding progress. This is because work is not always matched precisely enough to their abilities. Students with special educational needs make outstanding progress because of the very effective support they receive which is targeted to their particular needs. More-able students reach exceptionally high standards in their studies and results are consistently above other international schools.

Students consistently perform above the national standard in critical reading, writing and mathematics. In lessons, students display excellent attitudes to learning, they are willing and eager participants, enabling lessons to move at a good pace. They rapidly gain new skills, knowledge and understanding, and lessons are productive. Their literacy, numeracy and communication skills are excellent. When asked to read in lessons or to answer questions, the students do so confidently and fluently. They willingly take part in discussions. Performing arts students excel in their musical skills; they are regularly selected to perform in international orchestras, choirs and jazz bands. A combination of high academic achievement reflected in excellent examination results, extremely well-developed social skills and a keenness to learn, enables students to be very well placed to progress well to the next stage in their education and employment. Almost all students secure their choice of placement at universities in America or in the United Kingdom.

Pupils' behaviour and personal development

Outstanding

Students' behaviour and personal development in lessons and around the school are outstanding. The whole school is a caring and supportive community where students and staff enjoy mutual respect. Almost all parents and carers who responded to the on-line Ofsted questionnaire say that students are well behaved and all agree that students feel safe. The regular advisory and health lessons help students to understand how to live a healthy lifestyle, how to keep safe and how to manage risks in a range of situations, including the use of the internet. Students' mature and well-developed sense of responsibility is shown in their willingness to become active participants in the Student Government and the Faculty Student Disciplinary Board. They are tolerant, supportive and open minded. They talk with enthusiasm about what the school offers, especially the opportunities for self-expression. The very high quality publication of the school newspaper shows clear evidence of not only their ability to write highly effective articles but also their skill in stating a range of viewpoints and drawing conclusions.

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Students display extremely positive attitudes, as shown in their above average attendance and their strong perseverance and resilience when learning. They are proud of their contribution to the school and wider community, especially in music and sport.

The wide range of activities the school provides enables students to develop a broad range of skills, for example in team activities in which they can excel. These positive experiences make a very strong contribution to their high self-esteem. Regular visits to places of interest, including the Houses of Parliament, the Royal Courts of Justice and local libraries, enable students to develop a good understanding of British national institutions and public bodies.

Quality of teaching**Outstanding**

The quality of teaching is outstanding. It is supported very well by the planned curriculum and underpinned by the teachers' excellent subject knowledge.

Teachers are extremely committed. They have a very good understanding of the learning needs of almost all students and relationships in lessons are very positive. The regular verbal feedback and on-going assessment of learning provide teachers with high-quality information on students' performance which they use well to inform their teaching. There are regular opportunities for students' self-assessment during lessons, which promotes independence and a pursuit of excellence. Units of work in a range of subjects, presented very effectively by teachers, enable students to develop a deep understanding of a theme or topic over time through inquiry and collaboration. Lessons move at a swift pace and teaching assistants support individuals and groups of students very well. Early intervention strategies ensure that students who find learning difficult or who have special educational needs are extremely well supported to catch up quickly. Students are highly motivated, very well behaved and mature in their approach to discussions.

Classrooms are very well organised and resources are used very effectively to support students' learning, including the extensive use of individual laptops for students, which very successfully encourage them to develop their thinking and increase their involvement.

While much of the teaching seen on the inspection was outstanding, just occasionally, the questions asked by teachers in lessons and some tasks were not matched sufficiently well to students' individual learning needs, which slowed their pace of learning.

Quality of curriculum**Outstanding**

The quality of the curriculum is outstanding. It provides students with a rich and very broad range of high-quality learning experiences which are enhanced by an extensive range of enrichment activities so that the vast majority of students make rapid progress. It is underpinned by a philosophy that is built around encouraging and helping students to work independently and to collaborate effectively with others. The curriculum meets the needs of all students, including those with special educational needs who are provided with additional support for their particular needs.

In the Kindergarten classes, children are provided with a broad range of activities, which encourage learning through play. There are high expectations and provision to ensure the youngest children learn the sounds that letters make (phonics) securely. As a result, children make outstanding progress and are confident and independent learners.

The curriculum is well planned, with carefully designed units of work which cover the required areas of learning. Courses of study support the development of knowledge and skills in a broad range of subjects, including English, mathematics, social studies, science, French, Spanish and Chinese. Extensive options in the visual arts, drama, and technology are available and students are able to learn how to play a musical instrument of their choice. Environmental issues are explored at the Honeypot Lane Garden where students develop a greater understanding of growing and nurturing plants. This is a regular feature of the curriculum provision for lower school students. In the middle school, students are encouraged to develop critical thinking skills and study skills through units of work and projects. High school students are provided with further opportunities to follow the advanced placement programme prior to entering university. More-able students receive further challenges to develop their intellect.

Enrichment activities, such as the 'robotics programme' which links with a local academy, provide students with chances to collaborate with students in another school. The extensive range of extra-curricular provision includes a wide range of sporting and musical activities. Students take part in supporting local charities in their work and in extended visits to other countries such as the

Dominican Republic, China and Mexico. These visits are known as 'service learning partnerships', enabling students to develop a global awareness by giving support and services to communities locally, nationally and internationally. They serve to develop students personally, socially and intellectually. Overall, the curriculum meets the needs of all students exceptionally well, enabling them to embrace its core values of 'respect, responsibility, integrity, kindness and the courage to act'.

Pupils' welfare, health and safety

Outstanding

Provision for students' welfare, health and safety is outstanding. All the required policies, including guidance on child protection, are in place. All staff, including the designated officer for child protection, have been appropriately trained at the correct level. Very effective systems are in place to ensure the suitability of staff, volunteers and members of the board of trustees through robust recruitment checks. The results of the checks are properly recorded in a single central register. As a result, students feel very safe and are safe. Students are well supervised during outdoor play and on school trips. Site and school security are very good.

Robust risk assessments identify potential risks and provide information on how to mitigate hazards. Very good attention is paid to fire safety and evacuations regularly take place. Many members of staff have up-to-date first-aid training and the school nurses provide a wide range of high quality support for the well-being of students and staff. Health education is a significant part of the curriculum in the higher and middle schools, while students in the lower school learn about healthy eating. In the Kindergarten classes, adults are well deployed to support children's learning and welfare needs. Students report that bullying is rare, but is dealt with quickly and effectively. Attendance and admission registers are suitably maintained and meet requirements. All the independent school standards are met.

Leadership and management

Outstanding

Leadership and management are outstanding. There is clarity of vision for excellence which is communicated widely to all members of staff as well as parents and carers. Its mission to develop the character and intellect of each student is evident throughout the school.

Leaders and managers demonstrate an uncompromising drive to build on the school's existing strengths and sustain the students' high levels of achievement. The board of trustees has an excellent understanding of the school and, as a result, the school is able to improve, enhanced by effective strategic planning. Since the previous inspection, the appointment of the director of curriculum and instruction has ensured that the curriculum is regularly reviewed and robustly implemented. Staff performance is monitored regularly, and systems and procedures are in place to improve the quality of teaching where weaknesses have been identified. Although the trustees have an excellent understanding of the achievement of students, they do not currently produce and report on an overview of students' progress as a whole.

All of the required information is provided, or made available, to parents, carers and others. The school website is comprehensive and has a wealth of important and useful information to support parents and carers, to inform and update them regarding the school's work. The procedure for handling complaints fully meets requirements, which is an improvement since the previous inspection.

The school premises are well maintained and tidy, enabling students to learn in a safe and secure environment. Effective use is made of the well-resourced science laboratories, the music suite and sports halls as well as the attractively presented classrooms. The additional accommodation at the Canons Park site has been completely refurbished since the previous inspection and now provides suitable accommodation for sport and outdoor learning.

The trustees, leaders and managers of the school have ensured that all the independent school regulations are met.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	A school which provides an exceptional quality of education and significantly exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 2	Good	A school which provides a high quality of education that exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 3	Adequate	A school which meets minimum requirements but needs to improve the quality of education it provides.
Grade 4	Inadequate	A school where minimum requirements are not met and the quality of education has serious weaknesses.

School details

Unique reference number	101168
Inspection number	408703
DfE registration number	213/6215

This inspection was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Co-educational day school
School status	Independent school
Age range of pupils	4–18 years
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1354
Number of part time pupils	0
Chair of Trustees	Lori Fields
Headteacher	Mrs Coreen Hester
Date of previous school inspection	10–11 November 2009
Annual fees (day pupils)	£20,200–£23,550
Telephone number	0207 4491200
Fax number	0207 4491350
Email address	head_of_school@asl.org

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