

The Westminster School

Curral Road, Rowley Regis, West Midlands B65 9AN

Inspection dates

21–22 November 2017

Overall effectiveness	Outstanding
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Outstanding
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Outstanding
16 to 19 study programmes	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- The school's effectiveness has improved dramatically in recent years. This is because of the inspirational leadership of the headteacher and the dynamism, enthusiasm and commitment of the senior team and governors.
- Leaders are fundamentally committed to improving the life chances of pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities, both at The Westminster School and across the country.
- Aspects of the school's work, such as supported internships and apprenticeships, are at the forefront of national developments.
- The curriculum is exceptionally well organised and highly personalised. Arrangements for assessing and tracking pupils' progress are meticulous. Every step of progress, however small, is recorded and celebrated.
- Teachers and support staff are highly skilled. They know their pupils very well and expect a great deal from them. As a result, pupils make strong progress in their learning in all subjects and in their personal development.
- Pupils' behaviour is excellent. Pupils thoroughly enjoy their learning. There is a lot of laughter in lessons. Pupils embody the school's motto, 'Safe, Happy and Learning Together'.
- Pupils' welfare is one of the school's highest priorities. Staff give a great deal of attention to making sure that pupils have the necessary life skills and social skills to be well prepared for their next steps in the wider world.
- There is a strong culture of safeguarding. Parents, staff and pupils agree that pupils are kept safe at school. Pupils are taught how to manage risks and keep themselves safe.
- Post-16 provision focuses sharply on making sure that students maximise their potential. The post-16 leader is relentless in seeking ways to help students increase their independence, use their talents and make a positive contribution to society.
- The school has no substantial weaknesses, because leaders frequently review the school's effectiveness and take swift steps to deal with any areas for development.
- The school faces challenges, however, as the number of pupils grows. In particular, new staff will require support to develop their knowledge and understanding of how to teach the increasing proportion of pupils who have complex needs.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- As the school expands and continues to admit a greater proportion of pupils who have complex and varied special educational needs, ensure that new staff are given the training and support they require to strengthen their teaching skills as quickly as possible.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- The headteacher is an inspirational leader. She sets a strong strategic direction for the school that is absolutely centred on getting the very best for the pupils. She trusts and empowers members of the senior team and other leaders to take decisions and to lead developments. She has high expectations that everyone across the school will contribute to the drive for improvement. Staff rise to these expectations. As a result, the school's effectiveness has improved markedly.
- The Westminster School is at the forefront of innovative practices nationally as well as locally. Initiatives such as supported internships and supported apprenticeships are paving the way for other providers across the country.
- Leaders and staff are reflective practitioners. Their self-evaluation is accurate and rooted firmly in evidence. The school's development plan is sharply focused on the next steps that will further refine and extend current provision.
- In their drive for continued improvement, leaders are outward-looking and seek ideas and inspiration from research, other providers and professionals. They see things through; initiatives are piloted, evaluated and adjusted where necessary before being implemented across the school. Resulting guidance and policies are detailed, thorough and helpful to staff. Leaders are more than willing to share their findings and expertise with others, in the interests of improving outcomes for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities across the country.
- Leaders invest heavily in training and support for staff, at all levels. Support staff, for example, have been trained as Forest School leaders and have been accredited as travel trainers. Leaders carefully review how well teachers and support staff are doing. They provide support and guidance where needed, as well as further training to strengthen their expertise and to develop leaders for the future. Leaders are aware that they will have to provide good-quality support for the new staff that will be needed to cope with the increasing numbers of pupils who have complex needs.
- Additional funding, including the pupil premium and Year 7 catch-up funding, is used carefully and effectively. The spending takes full account of the needs of individual pupils and is very well targeted. As a result, there are no discernible differences in outcomes for different groups of pupils. The primary sports premium is used well and encourages younger pupils to participate in physical activities. Given the outstanding outcomes for pupils, special educational needs funding is very well spent indeed.
- The school's curriculum is a special strength. Leaders' first steps were to work out exactly what the pupils need to know and the skills that they need to develop if they are to succeed in later life. They designed the curriculum to respond to pupils' needs and aptitudes and to raise their aspirations. The curriculum is carefully organised and ambitious. It skilfully weaves together subject-specific content and the steps that pupils need to take towards independence. Different pathways make sure that the curriculum takes account of individual needs.
- Pupils who have complex needs follow a highly personalised curriculum (Personal Development Towards Independence) that links with the priorities in their education,

health and care plans.

- The curriculum contains a specific element called SHaLT (Safe, Happy and Learning Together). It makes sure that pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is appropriately promoted, in ways that are meaningful and relevant. It incorporates personal, social, health and economic education and is tailored to the pupils' needs and next steps. There is a strong emphasis on British values, also set in an appropriate context. Recently, the pupils' work on 'remembrance' included a celebration of the life of Jo Cox MP, as well as research into the people in the local area who gave their lives in both world wars.
- One pupil told inspectors that over the last academic year pupils made a total of 1,219 visits outside of school. This reflects the heavy emphasis that is placed on learning outside of the classroom. Some visits are to places close by, such as shops, and others are further afield, such as residential experiences and foreign travel. Lunchtime and after-school clubs also greatly enrich pupils' experiences.
- Communication with parents is strong. Leaders make sure that parents are fully consulted and involved in decisions about their child's education. Staff are also very supportive of parents who are understandably anxious about aspects of school life such as excursions and training for independent travel.

Governance of the school

- Governance is strong. Governors have a wide range of expertise and skill that they use to good effect. They are fully committed to making sure that the school provides nothing but the best for the pupils. They speak highly and with pride of the skills and achievements of the headteacher and leadership team, but they do not let this affect their judgement. They probe beneath the surface of information that they are given and seek reasons and explanations. They are not afraid to ask challenging questions. They visit often and meet staff and pupils. As a result, they have a detailed knowledge of the school's effectiveness. Governors work closely with leaders to set the strategic direction for the future.
- Governors know how the school spends any additional funding it receives, and discuss the impact with the school's leaders. They are also appropriately involved in decisions about pay.
- Governors keep their own performance under review. They commission external reviews and act on the findings.
- The chair of governors keeps a close eye on the school's arrangements for protecting pupils and keeping them safe. He supports leaders should the need arise. For example, governors joined with leaders in challenging the local authority about training in safeguarding for the drivers and escorts who bring pupils to school.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- There is a strong culture of safeguarding at The Westminster School. Leaders and governors understand the challenges that pupils and families may face in the local

area. They are also very well versed in what to look out for when working with pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. A detailed training programme that is regularly updated makes sure that safeguarding matters, including those such as child sexual exploitation and the risk of radicalisation, are at the forefront of everyone's thinking.

- The school's systems for making referrals and for recording action taken as a result are robust and well known to all relevant staff. The lead person for safeguarding keeps meticulous records. They show that leaders are quick to act and that they are not afraid to challenge or push for further action from other agencies where necessary.
- Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe and to deal with risks they may face, including when using the internet. During the inspection, pupils in one class practised how to respond in situations that make them uncomfortable. Parents and staff raised no concerns about pupils' safety at school.
- Leaders carry out thorough checks on the safeguarding arrangements at alternative providers, to make sure that pupils are safe there and well looked after.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- Teachers and support staff share leaders' ambitions for the pupils. They have high expectations of what their pupils should achieve in lessons and over time.
- Teachers plan tasks and activities that capture pupils' attention and make them want to learn. For example, in one of the classes for pupils who have complex needs, both pupils and staff dressed as scientists as they completed a series of investigations into man's impact on the natural environment. Pupils thoroughly enjoyed trying to make dirty water clean and protect toy ducks from oil spills in a tray of water.
- Teachers know their pupils very well. They understand how individual pupils like to learn, and take full account of preferred styles when planning lessons. As well as planning tasks that engage pupils' interest, teachers make sure that the activities are well matched to pupils' capabilities and build on what they already know. They show pupils what is expected and are very careful to provide just the right amount of support, so that pupils grow in confidence, resilience and independence. They ask questions that probe pupils' understanding and encourage them to express their thoughts.
- There is a lot of laughter and enjoyment in lessons and around the school. Relationships between staff and pupils are mutually respectful and warm. The genuine interest and care that staff have for the pupils shines through all that they do. Parents who spoke to inspectors recognised this. One commented: 'Westminster is a very special school with dedicated staff who are approachable and understanding.'
- Arrangements for assessing pupils' progress are particularly strong. Pupils' progress towards 'subject outcome statements' is carefully tracked in every subject that is taught. Alongside this, teachers record the nature of the support that pupils require to do their work, and chart their progress towards becoming independent learners. Pupils' achievements are regularly shared and celebrated with parents.
- Teachers make sure that pupils know how well they are doing. They talk to pupils about their progress. Displays in each classroom and in the corridors show information about progress in ways that pupils can understand. For example, pie charts (known in

the school as 'the Life of Pie') are regularly updated as pupils make progress. The charts are designed to gradually reveal a picture of the pupil underneath. Staff take every opportunity to celebrate success, in whatever subject or aspect of pupils' development, however small.

- Teachers make effective and innovative use of technology, to help pupils communicate their thoughts and ideas and to extend their experiences. During this inspection, pupils who were learning about Roald Dahl's book 'Matilda' wore virtual reality headsets to explore Matilda's library.
- Pupils are keen learners. They concentrate well in lessons, and persevere with their tasks. Their books are neat and tidy.
- Classrooms and the wider learning environment indoors and out are clean, bright and inviting.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding. As one pupil commented: 'They've changed me now. Who knows what could happen – I could be in a top job. I'm not alone in my learning difficulties. This has changed my whole life, not just mine, but my Mom and Dad's too.'
- Leaders make sure that a great deal of attention is given to supporting pupils to learn the skills that they will need to succeed in their next steps after school. This includes teaching pupils life skills such as how to look after their personal needs, how to keep their home clean and tidy, how to iron clothes and put them on hangers and how to cook simple dishes.
- Leaders' goal is that as many pupils as possible will take their place in the world of work. Consequently, there is a strong emphasis on employability and teaching pupils how to apply things they have learned in different contexts.
- The school's programme for sex and relationships education has recently been updated and strengthened to reflect the growing numbers of pupils taking part in work-experience placements and supported internships. It includes the things that pupils need to know about working and socialising alongside other people.
- Where appropriate, pupils are helped to learn to travel independently, both to school and to college or other placements.
- Pupils have the opportunity to take responsibility and to develop as leaders, for example by being part of the school council or acting as house captains. Older pupils are powerful role models for the younger ones. For example, one ex-pupil works as a supported apprentice with the company that maintains the school building.
- A current pupil has a supported internship and helps cook lunch for the whole campus. These young people are helping to raise pupils' aspirations and show them how they can contribute to their community.
- The school's broad curriculum teaches pupils about different cultures, religions and traditions. Pupils learn to celebrate difference and to accept and value one another for

what and who they are.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. Pupils are interested and enthused by their lessons. They listen well to the adults who work with them and are respectful and polite to adults and visitors. At an assembly during the inspection, the whole school sat and listened attentively to a member of the local church telling the story of 'The Good Samaritan'. Many were keen to answer questions afterwards. At social times, many pupils are lively and energetic. Others choose quiet activities such as computer club or gardening.
- Pupils know that friends sometimes fall out and that there are minor instances of misbehaviour. They say that bullying is not a problem, though, and that there is always someone for them to talk to. The Westminster School recently received a best practice award from the 'Educate and Celebrate' organisation for its work in raising awareness of homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying.
- Attendance has risen substantially since the school was last inspected. Many pupils join the school with a history of poor attendance. As a result of the work of the family support worker and other staff, attendance typically improves a great deal once a pupil has settled. There are a few pupils whose attendance does not match that of others, but this is largely due to their medical or emotional needs. The exciting curriculum and other opportunities are powerful motivators. Two parents described how their son insisted on coming to school even when ill, because he could not 'let the team down'.
- Pupils' attendance at alternative providers is excellent. A significant proportion of pupils at The Westminster School are looked after. Their attendance is very high and exceeds that of any other group of pupils.

Outcomes for pupils

Outstanding

- Pupils make strong progress from their starting points in all key stages. Every bit of progress that a pupil makes towards their targets in reading, writing, mathematics, science, music, drama and many other subjects is recorded and celebrated. Progress towards targets for personal development and independence is also meticulously tracked. The school's assessment information shows that many pupils make excellent progress over the course of the year.
- There are no discernible differences in the progress of different groups of pupils. This is because of the highly personalised approach to teaching and learning and the curriculum that is adjusted to take account of pupils' needs and interests.
- Pupils study for a wide range of accredited qualifications. Where appropriate, pupils take GCSE examinations in English and mathematics.
- Many are successful in these subjects at entry level. In addition, pupils study for a range of vocational qualifications that match their interests and aspirations. Most leave with several qualifications to their name. Pupils who attend alternative provision achieve a good degree of success in these placements.
- Pupils receive effective impartial careers advice and guidance. Many pupils now stay at

the school after the age of 16. Others progress to college or other educational institutions. The school's leaders make sure that pupils go on to worthwhile destinations and sustain their attendance there. Pupils' excellent achievement and the high-quality guidance they receive make sure that they are very well prepared for their next steps.

- Pupils enjoy books and reading. Many pupils were keen to read to inspectors. They read books that were appropriately matched to their capabilities. If they found a word they did not know, younger pupils tried to use their phonic knowledge to work it out, with some success. Some pupils, especially in the primary phase, make rapid progress in developing their reading skills once they are settled, and the teaching takes account of what they need to learn next.
- Leaders are taking steps to raise the profile of reading still further. During this inspection, a group of pupils met an author who has learning difficulties herself. The pupils were keen to look at books and to share their ideas. This activity is another example of the efforts the staff make to raise pupils' self-esteem and their aspirations for life after school.

16 to 19 study programmes

Outstanding

- The post-16 leader places the students' achievement at the heart of all that he does. He is always looking for ways to improve provision and enhance outcomes for the students. His enthusiasm for this is infectious. An example of one initiative is the '7 to 97' project. This project aims to increase the proportion of young people who have SEN and/or disabilities in the workplace from the current 7% nationally. The supported internships and supported apprenticeships that the school's leaders have developed are a crucial step along the way towards this.
- Leaders check teaching, learning and outcomes for students regularly and carefully. They take swift and effective action to deal with any potential areas of weakness. As a result, teaching, learning and assessment in the post-16 provision are of a very high quality.
- Teaching is well planned to meet the needs of individuals. Students undertake highly individualised and challenging learning activities that prepare them well for their future. They continue to study English and mathematics, and some improve their qualifications as a result. Reading, writing and mathematical skills are taught skilfully across a range of subjects. As a result, pupils make sustained and substantial progress, building on their prior learning.
- Teachers and support staff know the students very well, and listen to their views and opinions. They ask questions that check what pupils have learned and help deepen students' understanding. They give incisive feedback. They make sure that students have time to think and to practise so as to embed their learning.
- The curriculum is dynamic and rooted in real life. It is designed to help students make progress into the workplace, where appropriate. During this summer as part of a business enterprise initiative, some students made and packaged popcorn and others made wooden birdboxes and planters. They sold the items at a market in Birmingham. This activity made a huge contribution to students' mathematical skills and

understanding. It also boosted their self-esteem and confidence. For some, travelling to the market and interacting with the public were substantial challenges. The activity supported them in facing and overcoming their anxieties.

- Students grow in confidence. Their behaviour is excellent. They conduct themselves very well at school and at placements. They try hard in lessons and rise to the teachers' high expectations. Staff make sure that their personal, social and employability skills are purposefully developed, so that students understand the reasons behind what they are studying. Carefully tailored work experience and supported internships match their needs and interests very well.
- Students who spoke to inspectors were proud of what they have achieved and what they might go on to. They felt that they were helped to be successful as a result of the school's efforts on their behalf. One student on a supported internship spoke with great feeling of the positive difference that had been made to his life chances as a result.
- Almost all students stay at the school through Years 12, 13 and 14. The few who leave go on to specialist college or other providers that meet their particular needs. Effective impartial careers advice and guidance help pupils make suitable choices about their next steps.

School details

Unique reference number	132233
Local authority	Sandwell
Inspection number	10012670

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Special
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	7 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	190
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	48
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ken Ellis
Headteacher	Christine Hill
Telephone number	0121 561 6884
Website	www.thewestminsterschool.co.uk
Email address	headteacher@westminster.sandwell.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	22–23 May 2013

Information about this school

- The school is smaller than a typical secondary school, but the number of pupils on roll, including in key stage 2 and the post-16 provision, has increased substantially over the past four years.
- All the pupils have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan. Pupils' needs include moderate or severe learning difficulties, social, emotional and mental health difficulties, speech and language difficulties and autistic spectrum disorder. An increasing number of pupils have complex needs.
- Pupils come from a wide range of ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. A large proportion

are disadvantaged and several are looked after. Many pupils join or leave the school at different times across the school year.

- The school makes use of alternative provision for some pupils at Dudley College, Envirohort, Startright and Krunch.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed teaching and learning in classes in all key stages. While in classrooms, they spoke informally to pupils and looked at work in their books. They also looked at displays on classroom walls containing information about pupils' particular needs and the progress that they are making. Two inspectors listened to pupils reading. The inspectors also observed pupils as they arrived in the morning, at lesson changeover times, break and lunchtimes.
- The inspectors had several meetings with the headteacher and the senior leadership team. They also met the chair of the governing body and two other governors, the designated lead person for safeguarding and children who are looked after, the family support worker and a representative of the local authority. An inspector also met members of the school council.
- An inspector visited a pupil attending alternative provision at Startright.
- The inspection team reviewed a number of documents. These included the school's self-evaluation and plan for development, and information about safeguarding, assessment and tracking, the curriculum and spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. They also looked at information about the school's use of additional funding and the performance management of staff.
- To find out the views of parents and carers, inspectors spoke informally with some parents as they brought their children to school in the morning. They also met with a group of parents and took account of the free-text comments on Parent View. Because only a small number of parents and carers completed Ofsted's online Parent View survey, the results could not be viewed. Inspectors took account of the school's recent survey of parents' opinions.
- The inspection team took account of the views of 40 members of staff who completed Ofsted's online questionnaire.

Inspection team

Linda McGill, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Johanne Clifton	Ofsted Inspector
Simon Mosley	Her Majesty's Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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