

Westminster Academy

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	131262
Local Authority	NA
Inspection number	334441
Inspection dates	13–14 May 2009
Reporting inspector	Linda McGill HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Academy
School category	Non-maintained
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	847
Sixth form	71
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr George Cochrane
Principal	Ms Smita Bora
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Academy address	The Naim Dangoor Centre 255 Harrow Road London W2 5EZ
Telephone number	020 7121 0600
Fax number	020 7121 0601

Age group	11–19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three of Her Majesty's Inspectors.

Description of the school

Westminster Academy opened in September 2006 and moved into its current premises in September 2007. At that time, it also began to offer sixth form provision, and this year it began to teach the International Baccalaureate. The academy is smaller than the average secondary school, with 837 students on roll. There is a wide ethnic, linguistic and cultural mix in the student population, which reflects the area that the academy serves. Most of the students speak at least one other language in addition to English, and some are in the relatively early stages of learning English. A small number of students start at the academy at different times throughout the school year without previous experience of schooling in the UK, and some come from families that have been through trauma in their country of birth. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is very high, reflecting the challenging circumstances that many families face. The proportion who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is also very high. In the main, students' difficulties relate to their learning or their behaviour. Attainment on entry to the academy in Year 7 is below average but has improved a little over the past three years.

The academy's specialism is in international business and enterprise. The academy's distinctive building has won architectural awards. The current principal took up her post in September 2008.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the academy

Grade: 4

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a notice to improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to standards and achievement in English, mathematics and science.

Westminster Academy provides an acceptable standard of education for its students. It has faced considerable challenges since it opened. It has tackled them openly and robustly and the progress that has been made is testament, in no small part, to the commitment and determination of the principal, senior staff, governors and sponsors. They give a strong steer and clear direction to the academy's work. As a result, significant strides forward have been taken and the pace of improvement continues to accelerate. However, the students' achievement has not improved as quickly as other aspects of the academy's work and is inadequate.

A positive culture and climate for teaching and learning have been established. Students sought out inspectors to say how proud they are of their academy and that they enjoy their time there. Their personal development and well-being, including their behaviour and attendance, are satisfactory, and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Despite relishing the healthy food available in the 'sky dining' area, some older students do not participate readily in physical activity, which shows that they are not fully committed to a healthy lifestyle.

Much effort has gone into improving teaching; it is consistently satisfactory so that the students now make sound progress in lessons. The curriculum, especially at Key Stage 4, has breadth and relevance and is contributing to improvements in outcomes for the students. Recently, the collection of information about students' performance has become systematic and rigorous and staff are more confident in using this information to plan lessons and to target interventions. Rapid improvement has been brought about in the provision in the sixth form, helped by the introduction of the International Baccalaureate. All of these improvements confirm that the academy's capacity to bring about further improvement is well established.

Improvements in the academic outcomes for the students have not kept pace with other aspects of the academy's performance. Standards of attainment are very low for all groups of pupils. GCSE results are set to rise this year, confirming an upward trend from an exceptionally low base. However, the most important measure of achievement is the progress that students make from their starting points. At the moment, too few of them are making the progress that they should over time in both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4. Standards should be higher, especially in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. The 'topic' approach to organising the curriculum for younger students has merit in that it provides coherence, but its impact on boosting students' basic skills, especially in literacy, has been limited. The academy's specialism gives all students the opportunity to gain qualifications in business and information technology and to make a positive contribution to the community through the internship programme. However, it is not yet having an impact on attainment in other subjects.

Although teaching is now satisfactory and has some strengths, there are weaknesses which must be overcome if students' progress is to accelerate sufficiently for them to make up for previous low attainment and attain the standards of which they are capable. Too often, students all complete the same tasks in lessons, resulting in a lack of challenge for some. Tasks do not always take sufficient account of what students already know, and are pitched too low. Marking,

at its best, is exemplary but some teachers fail to give students the feedback and guidance they need. Some teachers accept work that is not well presented.

A key element of the vision for the academy is that it enriches the students' experiences and is a valuable resource for the community. The academy reaches out to the local community in many ways and its reputation and standing are rightly growing. The academy makes a strong contribution to community cohesion and effectively promotes equality of opportunity.

The principal is held in high regard by staff and students. She is a visible presence around the academy and her knowledge of individual students is impressive. She and the senior team know exactly what remains to be done and are determined to bring about what they describe as a 'step change' in the pace of improvement.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

Students rightly describe the sixth form as 'Different, diverse and opportunity rich!' A significant proportion of sixth form students have joined the academy from other schools and other countries and their understanding and tolerance of a wide range of cultures, beliefs and backgrounds are impressive – students see themselves as global citizens. They appreciate the friendly and supportive ethos, and relationships between all members of the community, both students and staff, are strong.

The academy recognised that when the sixth form opened, the curriculum was not appropriate for many students. The results for many in their first year were poor and, as a consequence, only about half of them progressed to the second year. These students are now making better progress, although a significant number are unlikely to attain their challenging targets this summer.

The current Year 12 students are studying a much more appropriate curriculum, which has been further enhanced for next year. Students study for the International Baccalaureate, vocational courses or A-Levels (offered as part of the Westminster 14-19 Partnership) or a combination. Overall, teaching is satisfactory. Students' progress is very carefully and regularly monitored and those in Year 12 are making broadly satisfactory progress. Many who are participating in the International Baccalaureate programme have made good progress.

Through the service element of the International Baccalaureate, students make a very valuable contribution to the local community, for example through working with the Rotary Club. Some students contribute well to the wider life of the academy, for example by serving customers in the Global Cafand;eacute;, but this aspect of sixth form life is as yet underdeveloped.

What the academy should do to improve further

- Accelerate students' progress and raise standards by:
 - further improving the way teachers use information about students' prior attainment to plan lessons that better match their learning needs
 - ensuring that marking enables students to understand what they need to do to improve
 - maximising opportunities in lessons and through other activities for students to develop their basic skills in literacy and numeracy.
- Take steps to ensure that the number of older students engaging in physical activities increases.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

The academy's results in 2008 were better than those of the previous year, particularly in the number of students gaining five good GCSE passes. When English and mathematics are included, the increase was modest and the results exceptionally low. Results are expected to rise again this year. The steps that the academy has taken to broaden the curriculum and to ensure that students study courses that meet their needs more appropriately are having some success. In addition, recent measures to boost attainment for Year 11 students have had a positive impact. Nevertheless, standards will remain very low. The academy's data show that not all students have made the progress that they should have across Key Stage 4 and that their achievement is inadequate. Similarly, the data show that only two thirds of students in Key Stage 3 are progressing quickly enough to reach the levels they should, given their prior attainment. Underachievement is not confined to any particular group or groups of students.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Students' personal development and well-being are satisfactory overall and some elements are good. The academy's purposeful learning environment nurtures students' good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Moral and cultural aspects are particularly strong and this has made a significant difference to behaviour and to racial harmony. Students have a strong sense of fairness and are very loyal to their academy. The rate of fixed-term exclusions was too high at the beginning of the year but has reduced dramatically since January; students understand and agree with the academy's high expectations. Behaviour in lessons and around the academy is satisfactory and sometimes good. This means that staff and students can focus more sharply on learning in class. Behaviour and social concerns are tracked, and rewards and sanctions applied, consistently across the house system.

Although all students are expected to participate in two hours of physical activity each week, many do not. Too few take advantage of the sports activities available at the end of the academy day. For this reason, students' commitment to a healthy lifestyle is inadequate. Secure relationships with staff and with one another ensure that students feel safe; they report that bullying is not a problem.

The internship programme helps students to make a positive contribution within their local community. It also helps prepare them adequately for the next steps after the age of 16. Although students' general level of attainment is often too low, those who are not on track to gain a GCSE in English and mathematics are supported in studying for other qualifications in basic literacy and numeracy.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Most students enjoy their lessons; they are keen to learn because teachers establish a good working atmosphere in their classes. Students particularly enjoy opportunities to discuss their ideas with one another and to work in groups. Teachers make sure that students understand clearly what they are going to learn. Practical activities often engage students' interest and a good range of resources is used. In one technology lesson students made and connected levers

to make movable 'funny faces'. One boy remarked, 'We are learning, Miss, but it's fun too!' Support staff usually work well with students to help them understand the work.

Students' progress is monitored regularly and discussed with them. However, teachers rarely use information from their assessments well enough to plan appropriate learning activities for different groups of students within the class, in particular to support those with learning difficulties and to provide more challenging work for the most able. Marking varies in its usefulness. Where it is good, books are regularly marked and helpful comments about how to improve work are made. However, too frequently, this is not the case.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is well constructed and has some strengths. At Key Stage 3, it builds on students' previous experiences at primary school. The integrated core curriculum, taught through topics that make appropriate links between subjects, enhances students' personal, learning and thinking skills, and prepares them for the demands of Key Stage 4. However, these lessons do not boost students' literacy skills rapidly enough and the academy has plans to address this weakness next year.

Some students begin GCSE courses at the end of Year 8. At Key Stage 4, a very broad range of academic and vocational courses mirrors students' interests and aptitudes. This is beginning to pay dividends and an increasing number of students are on track to gain GCSE or equivalent qualifications. All Key Stage 4 students take part in work-related learning experiences, including 'internships' in local businesses. In addition, they all have the opportunity to gain a qualification in entrepreneurship. Both of these are key features in preparing students for success in employment.

Numerous extra-curricular activities, trips, outings and visitors broaden students' horizons and develop their social and learning skills. The community sports centre on site offers an extensive range of sports and clubs. However, physical education is not a compulsory subject at Key Stage 4 and a significant proportion of students in Years 10 and 11 do not take any exercise during the week.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Pastoral support for students is good. However, the procedures and practices to promote students' academic outcomes are not always consistently applied. For example, the weekly one-to-one meetings between students and their tutors are effective in boosting students' personal skills and improving their attitudes to learning, but students are not always well informed in lessons about how to improve their work. Similarly, targets in students' individual learning plans and in the plans for those with additional learning needs are not used well to support their learning. Nevertheless, students view the support that they get from staff very positively. They say that they are helped when they have problems, but are also encouraged to aspire to higher things by recognising their own potential. Students' emotional well-being is successfully supported through the house system and contacts with other professionals. The academy effectively promotes students' personal development and works productively with their families. The academy meets all of the current government requirements for safeguarding students.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The principal and senior team share a strong commitment to ensuring the best for the students. There is a refreshingly open and honest culture in which staff at all levels are encouraged to reflect on their practice and to take steps to make it better. For example, middle leaders have been helped to strengthen their part in planning and driving improvements and to become more effective leaders of their departments. Middle leaders see how their work fits into the broader picture of improvement and understand their role in monitoring, evaluating and developing provision. However, they lack experience in planning for improvement and the departmental plans vary in quality and lack measurable success criteria. Nevertheless, it is clear that everyone is pulling together in the same direction. Governors and the academy's sponsors are fully involved in the academy's life and supportive of its efforts. They play an important part in helping to shape the academy's vision and in determining its strategic direction.

It is clear that the pace of change has increased since the appointment of the new principal. Targets have been used to raise teachers' and students' expectations of what they can achieve. Self-evaluation is rigorous. The academy works very well with a wide range of external agencies and actively seeks feedback and advice. The list of priorities that the academy is working on is extensive. There is a need to ensure that the focus is maintained on the key things that will make and sustain a difference.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	4	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	NA	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	4	

¹Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	4	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	3	
The attendance of learners	3	
The behaviour of learners	3	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	3	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3	3

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	Yes	

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

10 June 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Westminster Academy, London, W2 5EZ

My colleagues and I were pleased to spend time with you when we inspected your academy recently. Thank you for the warm welcome you gave us and for taking the time to speak with us to tell us your views. This letter is to give you a flavour of our findings - do read the full report, which is available on Ofsted's website.

You probably know that this was the academy's first inspection since it opened in 2006. You told us that things have improved steadily since then. We could see what you mean - we judged that most of the things that the academy does are 'satisfactory'. This means that they are fit for purpose. However, the academy has not yet been able to make sure that everyone makes the academic progress that they should over time. For this reason, we have given it a 'notice to improve'. We have highlighted that your progress and the standards you reach are the most important things that need to be worked on. The academy will be inspected again in about a year's time to check just how much your progress has improved.

There are some things that you can be especially proud of.

- You get on very well together and, as one of the sixth formers said, are learning to be 'global citizens'. You have a good sense of fairness, you understand right and wrong, and you welcome cultural diversity.
- The academy makes a strong contribution to community cohesion and equality of opportunity through the wide range of work that it does with you, the local community and in the wider educational world.
- There has been a rapid improvement in provision in the sixth form.

The academy is well placed to bring about the necessary improvements; it already has the tools it needs to do the job in its leaders, its staff and you, the students. I am confident that, if you all pull together, next year's inspection will find that things have moved on a good deal.

Yours faithfully

Linda McGill

Her Majesty's Inspector

P.S. We also noticed that not all of you take advantage of the many sporting and physical activities that are on offer. We urge you to give it a go - you will be healthier for it!