

The Westminster School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	132233
Local Authority	Sandwell
Inspection number	341320
Inspection dates	21–22 June 2010
Reporting inspector	Alan Dobbins

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	74
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	25
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Andrew Smith
Headteacher	Debra Williams
Date of previous school inspection	12 September 2006
School address	Westminster Road West Bromwich B71 2JN
Telephone number	0121 5882421
Fax number	0121 5885543
Email address	debra.williams@westminster.sandwell.sch.uk

Age group	11–19
Inspection dates	21–22 June 2010
Inspection number	341320

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It rates council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 08456 404045, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the documentation in any way.

Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester M2 7LA

T: 08456 404045

Textphone: 0161 618 8524

E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

© Crown copyright 2010

Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. Inspectors saw 14 lessons in whole or in part, observed eight teachers, spoke with the Chair of the Governing Body, senior leaders and the school improvement partner. They looked at data the school has on pupils' progress and analysed documents and policies. They scrutinised 47 staff and 53 pupil questionnaires. They also analysed 23 parental questionnaires, and spoke with two parents.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- the way in which the curriculum matches with pupils' learning and additional needs
- the capabilities and knowledge of teachers and their assistants in using specialist skills and teaching approaches in meeting the learning needs of all pupils
- how well pupils are doing in comparison with those in similar schools
- how well Sixth Form students are prepared for the next stage of their education and life thereafter.

Information about the school

The Westminster School is a small special school serving pupils with moderate learning difficulties. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs. Since the last inspection, an increasing number of pupils have entered who have severe and complex difficulties. Some pupils have serious difficulties in communicating and others a history of extended absence from their other schools. There are more than twice as many boys than girls. Most pupils are White British and about a quarter of the pupils are from ethnic minority backgrounds. More pupils than expected nationally are eligible for free school meals. The school is currently part of a rebuild programme to join with a mainstream secondary school in a new custom designed building on a new site. The new building is substantially completed with a planned opening date of March 2011. Amongst the awards the school holds is the Award for Exceptional Delivery of Physical Education and Sport.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

The Westminster School is a good school. It looks after its pupils outstandingly well, which pupils and parents acknowledge. Senior leaders have worked very hard and successfully in creating a secure, happy and well ordered place in which pupils thrive as learners and as developing young people. Pupils say they enjoy coming to school because they like it and they are making good progress in their learning. Parents and carers are fulsome in their praise for the school, one saying that 'The school has been so helpful to my son, and in helping me to help him. He can do so much more now than I ever thought he would be able to.'

Pupils settle quickly, as a result of the caring supportive ethos of the school. The good relationships pupils establish with the staff help them become increasingly confident as learners and better able to control their emotions and their behaviour. As they move through the school, they concentrate on their learning for longer periods of time and many routinely enjoy the experience of working hard to do their best. School data shows that the progress all pupils, including those with more complex needs, make against their targets for learning has improved for each of the last two years. Progress in English and in mathematics is good when benchmarked against that for pupils in equivalent schools in the region. Year 11 pupils show the extent of their learning over their time at school by gaining good grades on a wide range of nationally accredited awards. This year's leavers have achieved better grades on a wider range of courses than was the case for those who left in the last few years. In the Sixth Form, pupils do well over a curriculum that gives them many opportunities to access a more adult environment that helps prepare them for as independent a life as is possible when they leave school.

Pupils say they are safe in school; they behave well and have a secure understanding of right and wrong. As a result of good teaching they participate fully in learning activities. They show maturity when they have difficult choices to make, including those to do with staying safe and, especially, in keeping healthy. Almost all pupils attend regularly enough to gain full benefit from what the school offers.

Leaders know the school's strengths and weaknesses well enough through their effective procedures for self-evaluation and their good use of the system for monitoring and tracking pupils' progress. Since the last inspection, they have improved the way in which pupils and their families are supported and they have developed a more flexible curriculum that can be tailored more easily to match the needs, capabilities and interests of pupils. They have also established even closer links with parents and carers as partners in the school's work and have maintained pupils' good level of overall progress. The capacity for sustaining improvement is, therefore, good. Teachers talk

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

enthusiastically about the future possibilities in their new school and know, through their own accurate monitoring, that their specialist skills and knowledge in the use of communication strategies are not fully developed to consistently meet the needs of those with most severe and complex difficulties. They also know that their use of the targets in pupils' individual learning plans in guiding learning is not always effective enough.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise achievement further:
 - by extending the specialist skills and knowledge of teachers and their assistants in the use of communication strategies for pupils with severe and complex learning difficulties
 - sharpening the targets in pupils' individual learning plans so that they are more effective in guiding and promoting learning.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**2**

Pupils flourish, both as learners and as young people who are gaining independence skills, as best they can. The good relationships they have with their teachers and teaching assistants help them become increasingly comfortable and confident as learners. In most of the lessons pupils enjoy their learning because activities are stimulating, and this helps them develop their social skills and, for some, to gain better control of their behaviour. This is so for all pupils, including those with the most complex needs who have the greatest difficulty in communicating their thoughts and feelings. Generally, pupils make good progress against their lesson objectives. In some lessons, especially in physical education, the precise teaching of techniques and high levels of challenge resulted in strenuous efforts pupils made to do their best, and their outstanding progress.

In a small number of lessons teachers and their assistants were fully stretched in meeting the needs of those pupils with the most complex and severe learning difficulties, especially in improving their communication skills. Even so, tracking data shows that as they move through the school all pupils, including those with difficulties in communication, make equivalently good progress against their targets for learning. At the end of Year 11, pupils gain good grades over a wide range of accredited awards. For example good GCSE grades were achieved by pupils in Bengali and Spanish. Pupils take a greater number of subjects at entry level where they have achieved good passes in design and technology, information technology, religious studies and music, as well as in English, mathematics and science.

Pupils have a very clear awareness of the importance of staying healthy. They eagerly tell of the healthy foods they always choose at lunch times, the excellent range of fruit they can choose from throughout the day and their strong participation in the regular opportunities they have to be physically active, in their lessons in physical education and

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

in the lunch time and after school sports clubs. They are proud to be members of the school council and of the decisions they have made, especially in choosing the charitable causes they wish to support. They gain good awareness of the needs of the wider world through visitors to the school and from the residential visits they make to rural places outside of the city. They have many opportunities to focus on the needs of others and on how well they are doing in reviews. Their good gains in confidence and self-esteem support their good awareness of spiritual elements, such as the importance of trust and friendship.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	*
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Teachers know their pupils well and generally plan lessons that fit well with their learning and additional needs. School records show pupils make outstanding progress in more lessons than was the case at the last inspection. This is because of the ready

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

* In some special schools inspectors do not make a judgement about attainment in relation to expectations of the pupils' age.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

availability of competent teaching assistants who make sure that pupils receive help quickly when they find the work difficult, or are troubled. The targets in pupils' individual learning plans work well in the good or better lessons, but not well enough in a small number of lessons. In these lessons some tasks are too hard for pupils and others too easy and this limits the progress they make. The changing need of pupils is demanding more from teachers and their assistants in skills, knowledge and expertise. More often than not teachers and their assistants fully meet the emerging challenge of teaching pupils with more severe and complex difficulties than they have been used to in the past. When the challenge is not fully met it is most often because additional strategies for communicating are not used well enough.

The curriculum is relevant especially at Key Stage 4, where its organisation is flexible enough to provide bespoke learning experiences that match well with pupils' capabilities and interests. The strength of the curriculum is in the number and range of partners the school uses to provide meaningful learning experiences beyond those available at school. All pupils in Years 10 and 11 spend time at local colleges and with private training establishments and through the very effective work of Connexions gain awareness of the demands of different working environments. These opportunities are planned carefully for each pupil, to ensure that they complement learning at school in providing a cohesive learning experience. With an emphasis on work related education, the curriculum is successful in leading pupils toward being as independent as possible in preparing them well for the next stage of their lives.

The school works hard in providing good support and advice for pupils and their families. Parents and carers are very appreciative of this. For example, staff are quick to go to the pupils' home if there are issues to do with the welfare of the pupil that they can help with. The expert work of staff, sometimes guided by the advice of specialists, especially the speech therapists and those teachers from the visual and hearing impaired service, help all pupils thrive as learners and as growing young people. Parents and carers are thrilled with this, one saying, 'My son is gaining the best of everything at this school, including precious help with improving his speech and in giving him a feeling for what work is like.' Almost all parents and carers attend the annual review of their children's progress and some are involved in continuing to support their children in the home. The school is doing all it reasonably can to improve the attendance of the small number of pupils with a history of poor attendance before they joined the school.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

How effective are leadership and management?

Senior leaders are a unified and dedicated team. They are very well supported by governors in pursuing their ambitions for the school and driving improvements forward. Collectively, since the last inspection they have maintained the overall good quality of the school and improved some of the aspects, notably the care and well being of pupils, when time and energy have been required in planning for the new school. Teaching is monitored and evaluated well and leaders know that the increasing number of pupils with severe and complex difficulties is beginning to challenge the collective skill base and the experience of teachers and their assistants.

Safeguarding procedures are thorough as the school has adopted best practice. The very smooth operation of all procedures and policies to do with care and risk is ensured through regular and rigorous monitoring. Due regard has been paid to community cohesion, the audit providing a clear analysis of the religious, ethnic and socio-economic context of the school, and to links with the local community. Awareness of international matters is innovatively gained through the curriculum, which, for example, offers pupils opportunities to learn Punjabi, Bengali, Spanish and Welsh. Parents report that the school is a cohesive community and inspectors agree with this. There is no discrimination of any sort. All pupils, including those with more complex learning needs gain equal access to all that the school offers and nearly all pupils receive the same level of outstanding guidance and support. The systems for giving parents and carers information about the school work outstandingly well and the relationships many have developed with staff are solidly based on trust and respect. One parent said, 'This school is as important to me as is my family. I don't know where my son would be without it.' All at school know that the up coming move to the new building, and its location on a mainstream school site, provides a new opportunity for further improvement.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2
---	----------

Sixth form

Provision and leadership in the Sixth Form are good. This is because students are encouraged and guided toward achieving realistic but challenging targets that match well with their capabilities and interests. They are prepared well enough to anticipate success at the next stage of their education, which for most students is at a local college of further education.

Overall, teaching is good because the teaching team is skilled in understanding their students' needs and respond quickly and effectively to them. The flexible curriculum allows a good choice of courses, many of which are followed in the more adult environments of local colleges, the sites of other providers and in work placements. Students make good progress in the subjects and on their courses and equally good progress in developing their independence skills as they gain the confidence that comes from success in meeting new challenges. They receive outstanding support and guidance for their personal development especially over the time of transition to their next placement.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

Views of parents and carers

The parents and carers who returned the questionnaire or who talked to an inspector were very pleased with the work of the school. One parent judged the school to be 'great' and the staff as 'excellent'. Another said that she wouldn't have known what to do with her son if it wasn't for the help and support she has received from the school over along period of time. They support all aspects of the school, but especially the way in which staff are 'always there to help' not only with matters to do with their children but in supporting them as parents. They agree with the good teaching and the good progress their children make, the way the school is led and, especially, the way their children are prepared for their life after school. Two parents thought that the school did not deal well enough with the inappropriate behaviour of some pupils. Inspectors looked at this and found that the procedures for improving behaviour worked well and over the time of the inspection the school was a calm and well ordered place.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at The Westminster School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 23 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 74 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	11	48	10	43	2	9	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	7	30	13	57	3	13	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	6	26	15	65	2	9	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	7	30	16	70	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	10	43	11	48	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	5	22	15	65	2	9	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	5	22	17	74	0	0	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	8	35	12	52	1	4	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	9	39	9	39	3	13	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	9	39	10	43	2	9	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	9	39	12	52	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	10	43	12	52	1	4	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	8	35	13	57	2	9	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	51	45	0	4
Primary schools	6	41	42	10
Secondary schools	8	34	44	14
Sixth forms	10	37	50	3
Special schools	32	38	25	5
Pupil referral units	12	43	31	14
All schools	9	40	40	10

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above is for the period 1 September to 31 December 2009 and is the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn term 2009 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



23 June 2010

Dear Pupils and Students

Inspection of The Westminster School, West Bromwich, B71 2JN

It was lovely for me and my colleague to meet and spend time with you when we visited your school. Thank you for making us so welcome. We found your school to be a good school. These are some of the things we especially liked:

- you are safe and extremely well cared for at school
- the outstanding way the school links with your parents and carers in supporting you
- the good progress you make in your learning in lessons and in learning how to be as independent as possible
- you know the importance of a healthy lifestyle and most of you make healthy choices most of the time
- the way in which your headteacher and the other senior leaders keep looking at the school to see how they can improve it further.

There are two things we have asked the school to do to make it an even better school. We would like your teachers and their assistants to become better at teaching those of you who find communicating most difficult and also to create targets for learning in your individual learning plans that will be better at guiding your learning. Of course, you can help too, by always behaving as well as you did over the time of our visit and by continuing to work hard all the time.

Yours sincerely

Alan Dobbins

Lead inspector

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 08456 404045, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.