

# **INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE**

## **FOLLOW-UP INSPECTION REPORT ON**

### **Westminster Cathedral Choir School**

Full Name of the School	<b>Westminster Cathedral Choir School</b>
DCSF Number	<b>213/6197</b>
Registered Charity Number	<b>1063761</b>
Address	<b>Ambrosden Avenue, London SW1P 1QH</b>
Telephone Number	<b>020 7798 9081</b>
Fax Number	<b>020 7630 7209</b>
Email Address	<b>office@choirschool.com</b>
Headmaster	<b>Mr Neil McLaughlan</b>
Chairman of Governors	<b>Mr John Gibbs</b>
Age Range	<b>8 to 13</b>
Gender	<b>Boys</b>
Reporting Inspector	<b>Mr Richard Shannon</b>
Inspection Date	<b>14<sup>th</sup> January 2009</b>

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

### **Context of the Inspection**

- 1.1 This inspection was carried out to assess the school's progress in meeting the recommendations of the ISI report following the inspection of 28<sup>th</sup> to 31<sup>st</sup> January 2008. At that time, the school was not fulfilling its aims and aspirations and did not fully meet the needs of all its pupils.
- 1.2 This follow-up inspection was carried out by one inspector during one day. As a preliminary to it, evidence was considered from general school documentation and regulatory policies.
- 1.3 During the visit, meetings were held with the headmaster, the deputy head, the head of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (SMSCD) and the director of studies. Mass was attended in Westminster Cathedral, since whole-school worship was considered an essential element in strengthening the school's community spirit. Two full lessons were observed and the end of another lesson, samples of pupils' work were examined, interviews were held with pupils in Years 6 and 8, the centralised register of appointments was viewed, welfare policies and procedures were examined and the appointments procedure was checked. The procedures for rewards and sanctions were scrutinised, and the staff appraisal system, risk assessments and records of meetings were sampled. A guided tour of the washroom facilities and a brief visit to boarding accommodation were included. A meeting was held with the chairman of governors and feedback was provided to the headmaster and the chairman.

### **Characteristics of the School**

- 1.4 Westminster Cathedral Choir School is an independent day and boarding school. Its primary purpose is to educate the choristers of Westminster Cathedral. Most pupils have professional family backgrounds and their overall ability is well above average. No pupil has English as an additional language or a statement of special educational needs, but the school has identified nearly forty pupils who have learning difficulties or disabilities.

## **2. THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION**

### **The Educational Experience Provided**

- 2.1 The curriculum has been revised since the last inspection and provides a well-balanced spread of subjects to ensure an effective base for the pupils' learning. In particular, drama has been introduced for all year groups and supports the pupils' self-expression and personal development. The planning of subjects is systematic and promotes appropriate coverage of academic content and suitable emphasis on the needs of pupils with learning difficulties and those who are gifted or talented. The new outline of the school curriculum gives a clear view of the subjects studied. Additional sports fixtures have been arranged and extra-curricular activities offer a suitable measure of choice.

### **Pupils' Learning and Achievements**

- 2.2 The pupils are successful in their learning and move on to well-known senior schools of their choice. In lessons and written work, they show thorough understanding and make significant progress. They concentrate well and show interest in their learning.

### **Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development of Pupils**

- 2.3 The pupils' personal qualities are well developed for their age. They have individual opinions and express themselves readily in an open manner. They have a sense of community and learn to see themselves in a broader context through whole-school worship in Westminster Cathedral. They are committed to the values of the school through their study of relationships and virtues in personal, social and health education (PSHE) and their participation in raising money for charities at home and abroad. An outward-bound course in Year 4 helps pupils to work together and make friends. They benefit from contributions by external speakers who come to the school to represent particular charities. They enjoy the responsibilities now available to them in Year 8, where the school has established the roles of head boy, deputy head boy, head chorister and prefects. They learn about Christianity, Judaism and other faiths through their studies in religious education, PSHE and history. Their insights into other cultures and ways of life have been extended through school visits to France, Iceland, Ireland and Israel.

### **The Quality of Teaching (Including Assessment)**

- 2.4 Teaching is effective in enabling the pupils to make progress and the lessons observed had outstanding features in encouraging pupils to participate in the lesson and think about their learning. Marking is monitored and provides a certain amount of helpful guidance, though this approach is not strongly emphasised. The use of standardised tests establishes a useful starting-point for the measurement of pupils' subsequent progress.

## **3. THE QUALITY OF CARE AND RELATIONSHIPS**

### **The Quality of Pastoral Care, and the Welfare, Health and Safety of Pupils**

- 3.1 The school has worked hard to overcome the shortcomings noted at the last inspection and relationships have improved greatly through the career development scheme and training for staff. The school council has discussed relationships, and anti-bullying has received special emphasis to the point where it is clear that procedures are well established, fully known and appreciated by the pupils, who readily comment on their harmonious community. The anti-bullying policy is of high quality and has benefited from governor involvement. Its revised version is of high quality. A new policy for rewards and sanctions provides clear guidance on behaviour and the systems for merits and discipline are well defined, respected and effective. The sanctions available follow a defined scale according to the seriousness of the misdemeanour. The pupils are well aware of the merits and demerits and regard them as overwhelmingly positive.
- 3.2 The welfare of pupils is of high priority in the school and the child protection policy is of high quality now that it has been modified to accommodate the special responsibilities of independent school governors. Matters of health and safety receive close attention and contributions are made by a wide representation of perspectives from heads of department and others with particular responsibilities. Suitable risk assessments have been prepared for a wide range of purposes, covering safety both in school and on outside activities.

### **The Quality of Links with Parents and the Community**

- 3.3 The school has taken steps to ensure that parents are aware that the revised welfare documentation is available to them. The necessary policies are automatically available to

the parents of current and prospective pupils. Reports are sensitive and provide useful information, though subject-specific guidance does not feature strongly.

### **The Quality of Boarding Education**

- 3.4 Boarders' welfare is a high priority and notices indicate sources of support, including an independent listener. A governor has designated responsibility for boarding. The upgrading of boarding accommodation is partially completed and to a high standard. Washroom facilities are plentiful for the number of boarders and in good order.

## **4. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT**

### **The Quality of Governance**

- 4.1 Governance is effective and is becoming more closely involved in the work of the school through academic and pastoral sub-committees. It has provided the resources needed for the advantageous development of the school.

### **The Quality of Leadership and Management**

- 4.2 The leadership of the school is highly effective. It is energetic and purposeful and benefits from experience beyond the world of education. Many initiatives have combined to make heads of department and teachers more accountable. New responsibilities and a new senior management structure provide effective coverage of management responsibilities. The career development scheme has the features of an appraisal system and is becoming firmly established; it includes self-assessment and lesson observation. The school development plan takes close account of the action required by the last inspection and is linked to the career development scheme.
- 4.3 The central register of appointments is in good order, and the new chairman of governors is due to be registered with the DCSF.

## **5. THE SCHOOL'S RESPONSE TO THE RECOMMENDATIONS IN THE REPORT OF 28<sup>th</sup> to 31<sup>st</sup> JANUARY 2008**

### **Actions Required for Compliance with the Regulatory Requirements**

- 5.1 The inspection report contained the following regulatory requirements which needed attention to ensure compliance:
- (1) encourage pupils to accept responsibility for their behaviour, show initiative and understand how they can contribute to community life [Regulation 2.(c)];
  - (2) assist pupils to acquire an appreciation of and respect for their own and other cultures in a way that promotes tolerance and harmony between different cultural traditions [Regulation 2.(e)];
  - (3) produce a written policy to prevent bullying, which has regard to DCSF Guidance *Bullying: don't suffer in silence* [Regulation 3.(2)(a)];
  - (4) ensure the policy provides for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children who are pupils at the school, which complies with DCSF Guidance *Safeguarding Children and Safer Recruitment in Education* [Regulation 3.(2)(b)];

- (5) have regard to the DCSF Guidance *Health and Safety: Responsibilities and Powers* [Regulation 3.(4)];
- (6) ensure that there are sufficient washrooms for staff and pupils [Regulation 5.(k)];
- (7) in order to fulfil its duties under the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA), the school must produce the required written three-year plan [Other legislation].

### **Action taken**

- (1) The ethos of the school is now strongly proclaimed in the weekly celebration of Mass, attended by the whole school. The newly formulated SMSCD policy, the creation of posts of responsibility for pupils and the new policy for rewards and sanctions are having a strong influence on pupils' personal development.
- (2) The SMSCD policy and the scheme of work for religious education include helpful elements relating to different faiths and cultures.
- (3) Following advice, the revised anti-bullying policy is of high quality.
- (4) After its revisions, the child protection policy complies fully with the requirements of *Safeguarding Children and Safer Recruitment in Education*.
- (5) Risk assessments are in good order.
- (6) The number of washrooms is now appropriate for boarding and daytime use.
- (7) An adequate three-year plan has been written to fulfil requirements under SENDA.

### **Response to Other Recommendations**

5.2 The inspection report made the following recommendations:

1. give immediate attention to the recommendations laid out in this and the last report;
2. firmly establish an effective management structure with clearly defined roles and responsibilities for the creation, implementation and monitoring of policies, in order to enable governors to have firm oversight of educational, welfare and health and safety issues;
3. implement a comprehensive appraisal system to direct staff development more precisely to the school's overall improvement and teachers' individual training needs;
4. institute a fully comprehensive and consistent approach to acceptable behaviour and discipline, and a code of conduct.

### **Action taken**

1. Close attention has been given to all previous recommendations.
2. A new management structure has been introduced with clearly defined roles for the creation, implementation and monitoring of policies, and reports to the governors keep them well informed. In addition, the governors have constituted pastoral and academic sub-committees.
3. A suitable appraisal scheme has been introduced and is in active operation. It is linked to the main objectives for the school's improvement.

4. A clear policy has been introduced for rewards and sanctions. This is monitored carefully on a weekly basis.

## **6. CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS**

### **Overall Conclusions**

- 6.1 The school has made excellent progress in response to the last inspection and has met all the regulatory requirements and recommendations made. It has successfully carried out all the items in its action plan. It is set for a distinctive and purposeful future in compliance with national requirements and the realisation of its ethos.
- 6.2 The school meets all the regulatory requirements checked during this follow-up inspection.

### **Next Steps**

- 6.3 The school has no significant weaknesses, but to further its development it should:
  1. place particular emphasis on providing subject-specific guidance both in routine marking and in reports to parents.