



**INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE**

**INTEGRATED INSPECTION  
WESTMINSTER ABBEY CHOIR SCHOOL**

# INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

## Westminster Abbey Choir School

Full Name of School	<b>Westminster Abbey Choir School</b>			
DfE Number	<b>213/6044</b>			
Address	<b>Westminster Abbey Choir School</b>			
	<b>Dean's Yard</b>			
	<b>London</b>			
	<b>SW1P 3NY</b>			
	<b>England</b>			
Telephone Number	<b>020 7654 4918</b>			
Fax Number	<b>020 722 21548</b>			
Email Address	<b>headmaster@westminster-abbey.org</b>			
Headmaster	<b>Mr Jonathan Milton</b>			
Chair of Governors	<b>The Very Revd Dr John Hall</b>			
Age Range	<b>8 to 13</b>			
Total Number of Pupils	<b>30</b>			
Gender of Pupils	<b>Boys</b>			
Numbers by Age	8-11	<b>17</b>	11-13	<b>13</b>
Number of Day Pupils	Total:	<b>0</b>		
Number of Boarders	Total:	<b>30</b>		
	Full:	<b>26</b>	Weekly:	<b>4</b>
Inspection Dates	<b>10 to 13 November 2015</b>			

## PREFACE

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is the body approved by the Secretary of State for the purpose of inspecting schools belonging to the Independent Schools Council (ISC) Associations and reporting on compliance with the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014. The range of these Regulations can be viewed on the website [www.legislation.gov.uk](http://www.legislation.gov.uk). Additionally, inspections will consider the school's accessibility plan under Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 and the ban on corporal punishment introduced by the School Standards and Framework Act 1998.

This inspection report follows the *ISI schedule*. The inspection on which the report is based took place over a period of four continuous days in the school.

The previous ISI integrated inspection was in January 2011 and the previous ISI boarding intermediate inspection was in October 2013.

This inspection contains specific judgements on the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools. It comments on the progress made by the school in meeting the recommendations set out in the most recent statutory boarding inspection and evaluates the quality of the boarding experience and its contribution to pupils' education, personal development and welfare.

The inspection of the school is from an educational perspective and provides limited inspection of other aspects, although inspectors comment on any significant hazards or problems they encounter which have an adverse impact on children. The inspection does not include:

- (i) an exhaustive health and safety audit;
- (ii) an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features;
- (iii) an investigation of the financial viability of the school or its accounting procedures;
- (iv) an in-depth investigation of the school's compliance with employment law.

Inspectors may be aware of individual safeguarding concerns, allegations and complaints as part of the inspection process. Such matters will not usually be referred to in the published report but will have been considered by the team in reaching their judgements.

Both Ofsted and ISI inspect and report on the Independent School Standards Regulations. However, they apply different frameworks and have different criteria for judging school quality that are suited to the different types of schools they inspect. Both use a four point scale when making judgements of quality but, whilst the ISI terminology reflects quality judgements that are at least equivalent to those used by Ofsted, they also reflect the differences in approach. ISI reports do not provide a single overarching judgement for the school but instead give a clear judgement on each aspect of the school's work at the beginning of each section. **These headline statements must include one of the ISI descriptors 'excellent', 'good', 'sound' or 'unsatisfactory', and where achievement is 'exceptional' that term may be used for the top grade.** Elsewhere in the report, inspectors may use a range of different adjectives to make judgements.

## **INSPECTION EVIDENCE**

The inspectors observed lessons, conducted formal interviews with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with senior members of staff and with the chair of governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended registration sessions, prayers and evensong. Inspectors visited the boarding accommodation and the facilities for sick or injured pupils. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined regulatory documentation made available by the school.

### **Inspectors**

Mr Graham Sims

Mr Graham Malcolm

Mrs Sally Cunliffe

Reporting Inspector

Team Inspector (Head, IAPS school)

Co-ordinating Inspector for Boarding

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## 1. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

- 1.1 Westminster Abbey Choir School is a boarding preparatory school for boys from the age of eight to thirteen. The school is situated in the precincts of Westminster Abbey and is thought to have been founded around 1560. The current school building was constructed in 1915, substantially altered in 1995, and refurbished between 2002 and 2007. Since the previous inspection, further facilities have become available for the school's use at 4 Dean's Yard. The school is owned by the Dean and Chapter but, under its constitution, a board of governors manages, controls and directs the school. For administrative purposes, the school forms a part of Westminster Abbey, and its organist, who works closely with the school, is responsible for the training of the choir.
- 1.2 The school exists solely to educate and care for the boy choristers of the Abbey choir. Although a specialist music school, it aims to provide a broad academic education, which enables pupils to go on to senior school as confident, well-balanced individuals, able to take their places in society as good citizens and to form strong and enduring relationships with others. It seeks to provide a happy, safe and supportive boarding community, in which the pupils are mutually supportive as well as responsible and independent. The school aims to help pupils to benefit from an excellent musical education and to develop their creative, aesthetic, practical, physical, emotional and spiritual qualities and talents as fully as possible, especially through the opportunity of making a significant contribution to the life and work of Westminster Abbey.
- 1.3 At the time of the inspection, there were 30 boys on the roll, of whom four probationer choristers were weekly boarders and the rest were full-time boarders. Seven pupils have been identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). No pupil has a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan, and no pupil speaks English as an additional language. Approximately one out of every six pupils comes from a minority ethnic background. The large majority are from business or professional families. The school selects pupils according to their vocal and musical ability; the general ability profile of pupils when they enter the school is above the national average.
- 1.4 National Curriculum (NC) nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school. The year group nomenclature used by the school and its National Curriculum equivalence are shown in the following table.

School	NC name
Form I	Year 4
Form II	Year 5
Form III	Year 6
Form IV	Year 7
Form V	Year 8

## **2. THE SUCCESS OF THE SCHOOL**

### **2.(a) Main findings**

- 2.1 The school is highly successful in fulfilling its role of educating and caring for the boy choristers of Westminster Abbey, and in meeting its aim to help them to develop as confident, well-rounded individuals. The school balances its commitment to developing pupils' musical talents with the demands of an academic curriculum extremely well, whilst at the same time providing pupils with an excellent range of extra-curricular activities and excellent teaching. Responses to the questionnaire indicate that pupils relish the range of opportunities available to them. The pupils achieve high academic standards and exceptional qualities of choral and instrumental musicianship. Even though teachers do not always ensure pupils respond to their comments when work is marked, the pupils make excellent academic progress; their progress in music is exceptionally good.
- 2.2 The pupils' extensive involvement with the Abbey contributes strongly to their excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The pupils are well-informed individuals who develop an innate sense of how to behave in the most appropriate manner in different situations. Pupils from different ethnic backgrounds live and work together harmoniously. As choristers, they make an outstanding contribution to the local, national and global communities. The boarding experience makes an extremely important contribution to their all-round education and to ensuring they are very well prepared for the next stage of their education. The staff know the pupils extremely well and provide excellent pastoral care. They ensure that the most able pupils are sufficiently challenged and provide much individual attention to those who have particular needs, although they are not always fully conversant with the very best ways of dealing with a few special educational needs. Rigorous attention is given to the pupils' welfare, health and safety. The boarding environment is welcoming and friendly, and effective steps have been taken to implement recommendations from the previous inspection by providing space to which pupils may withdraw should they wish to have time to themselves.
- 2.3 The governing body fulfils its legal responsibilities extremely well, particularly with regard to the safeguarding of pupils. It ensures that the school has an excellent level of staffing, very good resources and well-maintained facilities. Excellent leadership has ensured a highly committed and dedicated staff who work together successfully to fulfil the school's aims. Since the previous inspection, leaders have implemented recommendations with regard to the curriculum and assessment effectively and have made other improvements which have enhanced the quality of education and outcomes for pupils. They have suitable plans for the long-term development of the school but do not always take sufficient time to evaluate how already excellent educational provision could be made even better. Links with parents are excellent. Parents are highly delighted with the quality of education provided and are unanimous in their praise for the way the school is led and managed.

## **2.(b) Action points**

### **(i) Compliance with regulatory requirements**

2.4 The school meets all the requirements of the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

2.5 The school meets all the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools 2015.

### **(ii) Recommendations for further improvement**

2.6 The school is advised to make the following improvements.

1. Ensure pupils respond to teachers' comments when their work is marked.
2. Provide teachers with further guidance on dealing with specific special educational needs.
3. Ensure leaders take sufficient time to evaluate how to make the quality of education even better.



### **3. THE QUALITY OF ACADEMIC AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS**

#### **3.(a) The quality of the pupils' achievements and learning**

- 3.1 The quality of pupils' achievements and learning is excellent.
- 3.2 The pupils are extremely well educated in accordance with the school's aim to develop their creative, aesthetic, practical and physical talents as fully as possible. The pupils achieve high standards in their academic work, developing excellent speaking and listening skills, and thorough competence in reading and writing. They show a high propensity for logical and independent thought as they respond with thoughtfulness, insight and interest, for example, to the views of many influential speakers and politicians in their unique position as choristers of Westminster Abbey. They apply their excellent mathematical skills well and develop sound skills in information and communication technology (ICT). They participate with great enthusiasm in physical activities, and a number of individuals demonstrate good prowess in sports. Their general knowledge is excellent and their musical achievements are exceptional. Their singing, both as a choir and individually, is of the very highest standard and pupils achieve extremely well in playing the piano and other musical instruments. Their repertoire of choral music is extensive and their knowledge of the works of many composers is exceptional.
- 3.3 Pupils' excellent achievements are reflected in the fact that most pupils who have left the school since the previous inspection have been awarded music scholarships, some have achieved academic scholarships and all have achieved places at selective secondary schools with high standards of entry. Pupils have achieved regular successes in the UK Mathematics Challenge. They have been recent prize-winners in competitions organised by the Choir Schools Association in composition and general knowledge. Pupils' successes in graded music examinations are numerous and often at a very high level, well above what is normally found for pupils of their age.
- 3.4 Pupils' attainment cannot be measured in relation to national tests but is judged to be high in relation to national age-related expectations and exceptional in terms of their musical attainment. This level of attainment, as judged by discussions with pupils, scrutiny of their written work, observation of their work during lessons and the demands of the curriculum, indicates that pupils make excellent progress relative to the average for pupils of similar ability. The small number of pupils with SEND make good progress, and in some areas reach standards which are in line with those of their peers. Talented musicians make exceptionally good progress, and those who are talented in other subjects, such as mathematics, also make excellent progress in relation to their abilities. Responses to the questionnaire indicate that pupils feel they are making good progress. Parents, too, are very pleased with the progress their children are making.
- 3.5 The pupils' attitudes to learning are excellent. Their behaviour in lessons is generally exemplary. The pupils work equally well individually, with a partner or as part of a larger group. They cope extremely well with the pressure of learning new choral works and performing in public each day. Most of the time, they transfer the focus, concentration and application shown during their choir rehearsals and singing performances to their work in the classroom. This helps them to make good use of the relatively short amount of time for each lesson. They organise themselves well and take responsibility for their learning. They show high levels of interest in all subjects, ask intelligent questions, give thoughtful answers and demonstrate a thirst

for knowledge. Their enthusiasm for learning is palpable. They relish the many opportunities which are offered to them and are deeply appreciative of the unique educational experience which the Abbey and the school offer them.

### **3.(b) The contribution of curricular and extra-curricular provision**

- 3.6 The contribution of curricular and extra-curricular provision is excellent.
- 3.7 The curriculum is effective in its coverage of all areas of learning and is suitable for all ages, abilities and needs. The school maintains a careful balance between fulfilling the very heavy demands made on the pupils as choristers and ensuring they receive a broad education supported by a varied and enjoyable extra-curricular programme, thus fulfilling its aims extremely well. Pupils are very well prepared for the next stage of their education. Comments and responses to the questionnaires indicate that both pupils and parents are extremely pleased with the range of activities and opportunities offered to the pupils.
- 3.8 In addition to the normal range of subjects, pupils are taught thinking skills in Year 5, Latin from Year 6 and Greek in Year 8. Pupils in Year 4 are taught for much of the time by a form teacher, which provides continuity and is highly effective in helping them to settle into the school. From Year 5, pupils benefit from subject-specialist teaching. A well-structured personal, social and health education (PSHCE) policy outlines schemes of work for each year group which, in addition to helping pupils learn important life lessons, ensure they learn about public institutions and the values which underpin British society. Through the curriculum and their many activities, the pupils receive a balanced presentation of opposing views in the coverage of political issues.
- 3.9 Developments since the previous inspection have added to the pupils' curricular and extra-curricular opportunities. In the summer, for example, the pupils receive tuition in a range of water-based sports activities. The opportunity to use the grassed area in Dean's Yard during break times provides further opportunity for physical recreation. The school day has been re-structured to extend lunch break, to allow for a daily form period, and to provide tutorial meetings where pupils of different ages mix and discuss matters of the moment. Greater focus on curricular planning, in response to a recommendation from the previous inspection, and more analytical use of standardised assessment tests have ensured the curriculum is better adapted to pupils' needs and staff receive more accurate information on the levels of pupils' progress and attainment.
- 3.10 The pupils have an extensive choice of imaginative extra-curricular activities, which they thoroughly enjoy. At the time of the inspection, this included cushion making, podcasting, a pupils' newsletter and computer coding, but the range varies each term. Traditional favourites, such as the train club and model making, remain very popular. The range of musical activities is exceptional. Every pupil receives individual tuition for the piano and another orchestral instrument each week, and every day starts with a half-hour of practice when strings, piano, woodwind and brass can be heard in every corner of the school. Two hour-long practice sessions, under expert direction, almost every day of the week enable the pupils to learn an incredibly wide range of choral music and to reach exceptionally high standards as they sing at seven or eight services each week in the Abbey. The pupils gain extensive international experience. The older choristers recently enjoyed a highly successful trip to the USA where they sang to packed audiences, whilst the younger

boys went to Norfolk on an outdoor pursuits week. Other choir tours in recent years have been to Australia, the USA and Russia.

- 3.11 Links with the community are extensive. All pupils, as choristers, perform a service to the nation by singing at the Abbey, and performing public concerts and recitals both in the United Kingdom and abroad. The choristers make recordings as well as performing in residential and day-care homes and at fund-raising events for charity.

### **3.(c) The contribution of teaching**

- 3.12 The contribution of teaching is excellent.
- 3.13 The teaching supports the school's aim to enable pupils to benefit from a broad academic education. It provides a wealth of opportunities for pupils to extend their learning and to make excellent progress, especially in music. Lessons are typically brisk, well planned and stimulating, and teachers demonstrate secure subject knowledge. The classroom atmosphere is warm, calm, productive and supportive. The teaching uses resources well, often engendering a sense of fun, and the pupils thoroughly enjoy their lessons. In a geography lesson in Year 5, for example, the pupils were intrigued to watch how the teacher used a bowl of hot water, cling film and ice to simulate the formation of rain. Time in the classroom is managed productively in order to maximise pupils' progress. The pupils are encouraged to work independently as well as to co-operate with others. Pupils in Year 8, for example, were completely absorbed in a practical science lesson on neutralisation as they worked in pairs to help each other measure pH values. The teaching and the interactions between staff and pupils promote tolerance and respect. The teachers are non-partisan on those occasions that they deal with political issues. At some stages of the week, the pupils can get very tired, but staff are sympathetic to their needs and plan accordingly in lessons. The teaching makes effective use of information and communication technology (ICT), an improvement since the previous inspection.
- 3.14 The marking is often thorough and provides pupils with constructive comments or targets for improvement. However, the teachers do not always ensure that pupils respond to these comments, thereby missing opportunities for pupils to improve the quality of their work even further. The teachers' expectations of the pupils are high, and lessons are frequently challenging and provide extension work for the most able. Topics are often linked to the pupils' experiences, such as when pupils in Year 6 were studying Romanesque architecture in history. The lesson became very relevant to them as they quickly identified the architectural styles of cathedrals all over the country as well as the Abbey's Romanesque origins.
- 3.15 Staff use information from the assessment of pupils' work very effectively to ensure that the teaching is well planned to meet pupils' needs. They know the pupils extremely well and make the most of the small class sizes to provide a very high level of support for those who need extra help or of challenge for the most able pupils. The teaching enables the small number of pupils with SEND to make good progress because they are given much attention. However, although staff have received some training in dealing with dyslexia, staff are not always conversant with the most effective ways of dealing with other additional learning needs. As a supplement to the regular teaching, a very small number of dyslexic pupils receive effective, targeted help, some from a visiting specialist.

- 3.16 Parents are very pleased with the level of attention that is given to their children and feel that the most able pupils receive appropriate support. The very large majority of pupils feel their teachers help them to learn and provide individual help when needed. A very small number of pupils feel that their homework (prep) does not help them to learn. The inspection found no evidence to suggest that the homework tasks set for pupils are inappropriate.

## **4. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT**

### **4.(a) The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils**

- 4.1 The quality of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent.
- 4.2 Through fulfilling its aim of helping pupils to make a significant and worthwhile contribution to the life and work of Westminster Abbey, the school demonstrates its commitment to helping pupils to understand the fundamental values which underpin British society. The pupils have an excellent knowledge and understanding of public institutions and services. They talk eloquently, thoughtfully and with balance about the views of the many famous people they have met or listened to. They have an excellent understanding of the democratic process and take a keen interest in political proceedings which take place on the doorstep of the school.
- 4.3 The excellent care and nurturing provided by the staff, and by the many people from the Abbey who are involved in the life of the school, enable pupils to develop their personal qualities rapidly and extremely well. By the time they reach Year 8, and in many cases long before then, pupils develop great confidence and self-awareness and show exceptional maturity for their age. Through their daily involvement in the worship of the Abbey, they develop an acute awareness of the non-material aspects of life. Through their exquisite singing, they also evoke a sense of profound awe and wonder in others. In lessons and in conversation, they are keen to talk about and debate religious and philosophical viewpoints. They develop a deep and wide-ranging appreciation of music.
- 4.4 The pupils have an extremely well developed sense of right and wrong. They express strong views on ethical issues and produce convincing arguments as to why they agree or disagree with viewpoints of speakers. Through their excellent behaviour in the school and when on public view, their innate and finely tuned sense of how to behave in different situations, and their strong moral convictions, they demonstrate great respect for the norms of good conduct and the civil and criminal law of England.
- 4.5 The pupils willingly accept the major responsibility, which they fulfil daily, to be key players in the life and worship of the Abbey. They make an exceptional contribution not only to the local community, but also to national events, and worldwide through their concerts, broadcasts and recordings. Within the school, there is a great sense of community. Any occasional disagreements between pupils are quickly resolved. Older pupils take care of younger pupils and there is a very strong sense of the school being one big family. The pupils are also conscious of those who are less fortunate than themselves. They perform in residential and day-care homes and regularly put on concerts for charity.
- 4.6 The pupils have an excellent understanding of and respect for the Christian faith, and the culture and achievements of the Western cultural tradition. In particular, they show very strong knowledge and appreciation of music from early times to the present day. Through their religious studies lessons and daily prayers, they are also extremely well informed about other faiths and cultures. They show great respect for others, regardless of background or personal characteristics, and relationships within the school between those from different ethnic backgrounds are extremely harmonious.

- 4.7 The pupils have an excellent standard of personal development by the time they leave the school, thus amply fulfilling the school's aim of helping pupils become confident, well-balanced individuals, who are able to take their places in society as good citizens and form strong and enduring relationships with others.

#### **4.(b) The contribution of arrangements for pastoral care**

- 4.8 The contribution of arrangements for pastoral care is excellent.
- 4.9 The staff give outstanding and dedicated support and guidance to the pupils in accordance with the school's aims. Pastoral arrangements are well organised and highly effective. Staff promote a relaxed, but nevertheless efficient, atmosphere in which relationships with pupils are warm, friendly and caring and in which the pupils thrive. They promote self-confidence through support, praise and encouragement. Pupils believe that the rules are fair, and they treat each other with courtesy and respect.
- 4.10 Since the previous inspection, the arrangements for pastoral care have been strengthened through the provision of an extra layer of support. The introduction of tutor groups has created a more cohesive community in which pupils understand each other better as a result of peer mentoring.
- 4.11 The school has effective systems for dealing with bullying. There was isolated adverse pupil and parent comment over the school's response to bullying. The view of the overwhelming majority of pupils and parents responding to the pre-inspection questionnaires is that any bullying is taken seriously and dealt with fairly by the school. Pupils were also quick to point out in their comments and during discussions that bullying is extremely rare. All of the parents responding to the questionnaire say that their children feel happy and safe at school. Staff follow up any behavioural incidents sensitively, maintain detailed records and provide further support whenever required. Inspectors found that on the few cases where bullying has been reported, detailed records show that the school's response has been in line with stated policy and procedures.
- 4.12 The school encourages pupils to be healthy through the provision of high-quality and plentiful food, which is much appreciated by the pupils. Although the school does not have its own playing fields, pupils have plenty of opportunity for games and physical activity at nearby facilities.
- 4.13 The school forum, in which pupils meet monthly with senior staff, provides an effective way for the school to seek, and then to act on, the views of pupils. Although responses to the questionnaire indicate that a small minority of pupils feel that staff are not always fair in the way they give rewards and sanctions, the inspection found that pupils understand the system, that it is generally fairly applied, and that it plays an important role in encouraging the pupils' excellent behaviour.
- 4.14 The school has a suitable accessibility plan which seeks to address the limitations of the accommodation and nature of the school.

#### **4.(c) The contribution of arrangements for welfare, health and safety**

- 4.15 The contribution of arrangements for welfare, health and safety is excellent.
- 4.16 The school's arrangements for child protection and safeguarding pupils are comprehensive and effective, and they support the aims of the school. They take the special circumstances of the school fully into consideration and have regard to current official guidance. They are followed meticulously by staff at all levels. Designated staff who have responsibility for child protection have a thorough understanding of their role. The school ensures that it follows recommended procedures for the safe recruitment of staff, which have been improved since the previous inspection, and it is now rigorous in carrying out and recording vetting checks for all adults who come into contact with the pupils. All staff receive safeguarding training, in line with local guidelines, at regular intervals, and new staff receive a thorough induction into the school's safeguarding procedures. Staff know the correct reporting procedures if they have concerns about pupils' welfare. The school makes pupils aware of dangers associated with the use of the internet and social media, and employs rigorous filtering systems to maintain safety. Two interactive sessions with a specialist on e-safety during the inspection were highly effective in making the pupils aware of the dangers of misuse.
- 4.17 Measures to reduce and manage risks from fire and other hazards are detailed, highly effective and rigorously documented. Fire drills take place regularly at varied times, to include boarding time.
- 4.18 Effective arrangements to ensure the health and medical care of pupils are provided in the well-equipped medical centre, which is staffed by a qualified nurse. All teaching staff have first-aid training. With the pressures associated with the pupils' role as choristers, staff are highly attuned to ensuring pupils' emotional health needs are met, especially for a small number of pupils who have particular emotional or social needs.
- 4.19 Pupils' attendance is checked regularly and recorded in attendance registers. The school maintains an appropriate admission register. Registers are properly maintained and carefully stored for the required amount of time.

#### **4.(d) The quality of boarding**

- 4.20 The quality of boarding is excellent.
- 4.21 The outcomes for boarders are excellent. The boarders' excellent personal development is reflected in the confidence of their interaction with adults, their considerable contributions to the life of both the Abbey and the boarding school, and their support of each other. The boarding environment and routine provide excellent opportunities for pupils to develop high levels of musicianship. The boarders are remarkably resilient for their age and cope extremely well with the demands of the life of a high-profile chorister. This experience teaches them valuable life skills, not least the ability to concentrate for long periods of time, to perform in public and to work as a team.
- 4.22 When the boarders are not engaged in musical activities, they enjoy the recreational life of the boarding house and value the friendships they make with each other. They have a positive attitude towards maintaining high standards of behaviour and appreciate the staff's support of them in all aspects of their lives. They contribute to

the wider life of the community beyond the Abbey through the various charities which they support and which are chosen in discussions at the school forum. The forum also allows boarders to express their views. A common room for the senior pupils has been created in response to a recommendation from the previous inspection for additional quiet space, and this has been well received. Pupils have the opportunity to take responsibility for various areas of the boarding house which helps them to develop self-reliance, their ability to share and their understanding of living together as a community. Boarders have access to information about the outside world through the internet and daily newspapers in the library.

- 4.23 The quality of boarding provision and care is excellent. A team of highly committed staff provides excellent care for all boarders, treating them as individuals and taking a great interest in their personal development. Staffing levels are high, and at least two members of boarding staff are on duty throughout the day and overnight. The recently refurbished accommodation is bright, warm and comfortable. Boarders share bunk bed 'cubicles', and they are allowed to put up posters and family photographs to make their area homely. In their response to the pre-inspection questionnaire, a minority of boarders felt their belongings are not safe. In discussions with inspectors, it was felt that belongings are lost rather than being taken. Each boarder has a lockable space to use if he wishes, though few choose to do so.
- 4.24 The induction of new boarders is clearly defined. In advance of their arrival, a welcome card and a useful handbook are sent home. Together with the boarding staff, older boarders ensure that the new boarders settle quickly into their new environment. Although a few may be homesick for a while, serious episodes of homesickness are rare. There is plenty of space for relaxation, and boarders can watch television and DVDs, play table tennis or snooker, and use the train set. In the questionnaire, a small minority of boarders said they were not happy with the balance of free time and activities in the evenings and at weekends. The demands of choristership are such that much of a boarder's time is highly regulated, and it is not easy to spread recreational time evenly throughout the week. They fully appreciate this and show a very strong commitment to the responsibilities thrust upon them. The school tries hard to address this issue, for example, by being flexible when there is particular pressure for major occasions and through the wide range of activities that are available to the pupils and which they greatly enjoy.
- 4.25 Boarders are confident in knowing to whom they can turn for help. In addition to the boarding staff, the school chaplain is a familiar face and regularly joins the boarders for lunch. Telephone numbers for advice helplines outside school are clearly displayed, and an independent listener is available. Boarders can maintain regular contact with their families through the landline phones provided by the school and by email.
- 4.26 The medical care for boarders is good. Those who are ill are looked after by a suitably qualified nurse in appropriately furnished accommodation. All medical protocols are in place and record keeping is secure. A doctor holds a surgery once a week and arrangements can be made for boarders to access other medical services. The arrangements for self-medication are in place and the rights of boarders are respected. In the questionnaire, a small minority of boarders felt they are not well looked after when they are unwell. However, inspection findings conclude that the necessary medical systems are in place to ensure good care.



- 4.27 Boarders enjoy well-balanced menus with healthy options, and provision is made for special dietary needs. In their response to the questionnaire, an overwhelming majority of boarders stated that the food is excellent. Kitchens are hygienic, and the dining room provides sufficient space and is comfortable. Birthdays are celebrated with a special cake baked by the chef. Drinking water is available and, if the boarders are hungry in the evenings, a snack can be provided. Boarders may purchase necessary personal and stationery items. Excellent provision is made for laundering pupils' clothing and bedding.
- 4.28 The arrangements for welfare and safeguarding are excellent. All staff training is kept rigorously up to date and staff are confident in responding, in accordance with procedures, should a child protection issue arise. Access to the boarding house is secured by keypads, and the codes are changed regularly. Boarders say they feel very safe in their accommodation. Excellent communication between staff and parents underpins the safety of the boarders.
- 4.29 The clear system of rewards and sanctions, instigated in response to a recommendation from the previous boarding inspection, ensures that boarders live in harmony, are kind to others and take responsibility for their own actions. Procedures for signing in and out are secure, and staff are always aware of the boarders' whereabouts. Appropriate risk assessments are reviewed regularly. Fire-prevention arrangements are rigorous, and well-recorded fire drills take place during boarding hours. Incidents of bullying, including cyber-bullying, are rare and, should they arise, are dealt with quickly and effectively. Internet usage is controlled and monitored effectively.
- 4.30 The effectiveness of leadership and management is excellent. The staff are a highly dedicated and professional team. As a result, the school is extremely successful in fulfilling its aim of providing a caring and supportive environment, which nurtures and prepares the boys extremely well to perform their duties as choristers. All staff meet regularly to discuss the needs of the boarders. The introduction of mixed-age tutor groups has significantly enhanced the pastoral care, allowing boarders opportunities to mix across the year groups and share experiences. Governors and senior leaders have a clear vision for the development of boarding. Policies are reviewed annually and properly implemented. The school has a comprehensive complaints policy for parents. Parents are kept well informed about their children's progress and achievements and are welcomed at all school events. The overwhelming majority of parents who responded to the questionnaire are highly delighted with the boarding life of the school and recognise the outstanding contribution it makes to the boarders' progress and development.

## **5. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

### **5.(a) The quality of governance**

- 5.1 The quality of governance is excellent.
- 5.2 The governing body provides effective oversight of the school and ensures the school fulfils its aims to provide pupils with an excellent musical education and to enable them to make a worthwhile contribution to the life and work of Westminster Abbey. The wide range of expertise of governors ensures excellent oversight of educational standards. The governing body's access to the wider resources of the Abbey ensures excellent financial planning and investment, which provides the pupils with well-maintained accommodation, access to other locations for sports activities, very good educational resources, and an excellent level of staffing which meets the pupils' needs extremely well.
- 5.3 Through regular reports from the headmaster, the occasional participation of staff reporting on their responsibilities at meetings of the governing body, and their visits to the school, governors gain a very good insight into the working of the school. Many governors also interact frequently with the pupils, as they undertake their duties in the Abbey, and with parents who attend services, thereby gaining further insight into the life of the school. Governors provide excellent support for the school and provide challenge and stimulus for growth and improvement.
- 5.4 The governing body is effective in discharging its responsibilities for statutory requirements. In particular, it carries out a thorough annual review of the school's safeguarding arrangements and has ensured appropriate and exhaustive arrangements for dealing with the very few formal complaints which have been made by parents since the previous inspection.
- 5.5 The governing body has ensured that the recommendations from the previous inspection have been implemented and that excellent features noted at that time have been maintained.

### **5.(b) The quality of leadership and management, including links with parents, carers and guardians**

- 5.6 The quality of leadership and management, including links with parents, is excellent.
- 5.7 In this small school, many leadership responsibilities are fulfilled by a small number of staff, although this situation has eased since the previous inspection through the appointment of a part-time bursar and the creation of the post of senior tutor. Almost all of the school's full-time teaching staff have some form of leadership responsibility, especially for leading the subjects which they teach. At all levels of responsibility, the leadership and management of the school are highly effective in ensuring the school fulfils its wide-ranging aims and discharges its responsibilities. In particular, the leadership ensures that staff are appropriately trained in safeguarding, welfare, health and safety, and that policies for the safeguarding of pupils are implemented effectively and take into consideration the many occasions on which pupils appear and perform in public. It ensures that there are rigorous procedures for checking the suitability of staff, governors and other adults who work with the pupils; these are improved since the previous inspection.

- 5.8 Leaders and staff have a very clear understanding of the educational direction of the school, which gives high priority to providing pupils with a rich, varied and wide-ranging musical education, not only through their choral singing, but through daily tuition and practice of the piano and a musical instrument, and by providing many opportunities for pupils to listen privately and corporately to a very wide range of music. Leaders ensure that this prime objective is not at the expense of receiving a broad and balanced academic education and the opportunity to experience a wide range of additional activities. Leaders are creative in their adaptation of the timetable, and make full use of the many special occasions during the year to broaden the pupils' educational experience and understanding. Leaders pay great attention to the pupils' personal development and work hard to help any pupil experiencing personal difficulties and all pupils to cope with the considerable pressures which their public role places upon their shoulders. They ensure that values which encourage respect for others and democracy are essential elements of the ethos of the school.
- 5.9 Leaders have a good understanding of the effectiveness of the school, what works well and what could be improved. They are effective in ensuring that identified priorities for improvement are implemented, such as revisions to the school day, which have provided a stronger framework for the pastoral care and guidance of the pupils. The school's development plan sets out priorities for future development, and leaders and governors have taken steps to consider possible developments over the longer term.
- 5.10 The leadership ensures that staff receive professional development by attending external training courses or through sessions arranged at school, as appropriate. Schemes of work are carefully monitored and discussed at regular staff meetings where individual pupils' attainment and progress are discussed and action plans put in place for those who are not meeting expectations, with parents being informed. Since the previous inspection, the school has improved its oversight of the curriculum, the quality of teaching and the identification, support and monitoring of those with SEND through the appointment of a senior tutor. This has been beneficial in many ways. However, leaders' heavy involvement in the day-to-day running of the school results in limited opportunity for them to reflect on how the already excellent educational provision could be made even better or, for example, some of the pressure points for pupils during the week could be relieved.
- 5.11 At all levels, the school is managed efficiently and effectively. Various departments within the Abbey are generous in the support they provide the school, particularly with regard to day-to-day maintenance and matters of welfare, health and safety. Managers have secured sufficient high-quality staff and ensured that they are suitably trained for their roles. Leaders have been conspicuously successful in engendering an excellent sense of teamwork and co-operation among the staff which results in all contributing to the excellent, harmonious and friendly ethos which permeates the school.
- 5.12 Links with parents are very strong. Contact with staff is regular. Parents see staff informally at weekend pick-up and drop-off times and more regularly if they attend evensong. This informal contact allows parents the valuable opportunity to keep abreast of their children's challenges and successes on an informal basis. The school is extremely approachable and can be contacted very easily. A weekly open-door opportunity allows parents to visit and share any concerns on an informal basis. The school's complaints policy for parents complies with regulations. The school

investigates any parental concerns carefully and thoroughly, and keeps thorough written records.

- 5.13 Parents can access general information and copies of school policies through the school's pages on the Abbey's website. Parents of prospective pupils receive a comprehensive information pack with information about all aspects of school life and explanation of the particular demands associated with life as a chorister. A weekly newsletter gives comprehensive information about future dates, special services, additional arrangements for music lessons, match reports and other details of interest. A weekly general knowledge quiz provides cerebral fun for both the pupils and their parents and affords an opportunity for them to pit their wits against each other.
- 5.14 Parents have excellent opportunities to be involved in the life of the school. Receptions held at the school after events at the Abbey and school recitals allow parents to socialise and mingle with staff and other parents. The parental music fund committee is very active in arranging events to raise money to benefit the school. The choir school's summer fete is a notable example and is anticipated with much enthusiasm.
- 5.15 Parents are kept well informed about the academic progress of their children. They receive assessment grades every half term and written reports every term. Formal parents' meetings are held at least once each year. Reports generally offer plenty of encouragement and recognition of pupils' achievements. Staff comments on pupils' personal development display a comprehensive knowledge and understanding of their pupils.
- 5.16 Almost every family responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire and indicated very high levels of satisfaction with what the school offers to their children. They are particularly pleased with the range of experiences available to their children, the standards of behaviour, the fact that their children feel happy and safe at school, and the quality of the boarding experience. They are unanimous in their praise for the leadership of the school and the way that the school responds to any concerns they might have.

**What the school should do to improve is given at the beginning of the report in section 2.**