



INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

WESTMINSTER CATHEDRAL CHOIR SCHOOL

INTEGRATED INSPECTION

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

Full Name of School	Westminster Cathedral Choir School			
DfE Number	213/6197			
Registered Charity Number	1063761			
Address	Westminster Cathedral Choir School Ambrosden Avenue London SW1P 1QH			
Telephone Number	020 77989081			
Fax Number	020 76307209			
Email Address	office@choirschool.com			
Head	Mr Neil McLaughlan			
Chair of Governors	Mr John Gibbs			
Age Range	7 to 13			
Total Number of Pupils	152			
Gender of Pupils	Boys			
Numbers by Age	5-11:	90	11-18:	62
Number of Day Pupils	Total:	126		
Number of Boarders	Total:	26		
	Full:	26	Weekly:	0
Inspection dates	06 Mar 2012 to 09 Mar 2012			

PREFACE

This inspection report follows the *ISI schedule*, which occupies a period of four continuous days in the school. The previous ISI inspection was in January 2008.

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) (England) Regulations 2010. The range of these Regulations, which replace those first introduced on 1 September 2003, can be viewed through the following link: www.legislation.gov.uk. Search for Independent School Standards Regulations and enter date 2010, to find Schedule 1, Parts 1-7.

Legislation additional to Part 3, Welfare, health and safety of pupils, is as follows.

- (i) The Equality Act 2010 (including race, gender, special educational needs and disability).
- (ii) The School Standards and Framework Act 1998, banning corporal punishment.

The inspection was also carried out under the arrangements of the ISC Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership.

Under Government arrangements, the inspection of boarding became an integrated part of ISI inspections from 1 September 2011. 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. Boarding inspections were previously carried out by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), Children's Services and Skills. The relevant Ofsted report refers to an inspection in March 2011 and can be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk under Children's social care/Boarding school.

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.

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. **For EYFS registered provision (for pupils aged under three), reports are required to use the**

same terminology ('outstanding', 'good', 'satisfactory' and 'inadequate') as Ofsted reports.

INSPECTION EVIDENCE

The inspectors observed lessons, conducted formal interviews with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with members of staff, with the chair of governors and with the governor responsible for boarding. They observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended registration sessions and assemblies. Inspectors visited boarding areas 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 David Defoe

Mr Peter Cook

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Reporting Inspector

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1. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

- 1.1 Westminster Cathedral Choir School was founded in 1902, the original prime purpose, still intact, being to educate the choristers of Westminster Cathedral. It is now a day and boarding school for boys aged seven to thirteen years. The school's proprietors delegate responsibility for oversight of the school to a governing body which has a range of different backgrounds. Some of the teaching rooms and all the boarding accommodation are housed in a listed building; specialist teaching facilities for science and music are in a nearby building. Since the previous inspection in 2008, the age range of the pupils has been extended by the addition of a class for boys aged seven years. Other significant changes have been the upgrading and renovating of the boarding areas, the classrooms and the offices in the main building; the playground has also been redesigned and resurfaced, and now contains a play area. The school currently has 152 pupils; the 26 choristers are full boarders.
- 1.2 Most pupils come from professional families living within 30 miles of the school, and have been born in the UK; about a quarter of the pupils originate from foreign countries, with the largest grouping coming from Italy. Most pupils join the school at seven or eight years of age, but pupils can enter at any age if places are available. Day boys are assessed for entry in the January before they seek to join the school, and sit papers in English, mathematics and general reasoning. Admission for entry as a boarding chorister follows informal and formal voice trials with the master of music at Westminster Cathedral, and academic assessments in the school. Most pupils continue until the age of 13 before proceeding to a wide range of independent day and boarding schools.
- 1.3 Nine pupils receive extra specialist help because they do not have English as their first language (EAL). Thirteen pupils receive specialist individual help for their learning difficulties (SEND). No pupil has a statement of special educational need. Standardised tests show the pupils' average ability to be above the national average, with pupils having a fairly wide range of ability. A few pupils have ability below the national average, and one in seven has ability well above this average.
- 1.4 As well as aiming to supply choristers for a world-class choir for Westminster Cathedral, the school's aims are to nurture in each child Catholic values, where good behaviour is the norm, and to provide a broad, outstanding and demanding academic education, together with many extra-curricular activities, including a range of sports and excellent musical opportunities for all pupils, whilst preparing pupils for continuing education through responsibility, experience and opportunity.
- 1.5 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school.

2. THE SUCCESS OF THE SCHOOL

2.(a) Main findings

- 2.1 The school, renowned for the excellence achieved by its choristers, provides an excellent learning environment through a broad curriculum and programme of activities. This serves the needs of both the day pupils and the choristers as far as is possible. The overall standard of teaching is excellent, and this enables pupils to make rapid progress and achieve high standards relative to their abilities. The pupils with SEND, and those with EAL, receive effective specialist lessons. These pupils make at least good progress, and those with EAL progress especially rapidly, helped by conversation with their peers. The pace of teaching contributes greatly to the pupils' success, and other characteristics often evident are strong subject knowledge, and the enthusiasm and encouragement provided, to which pupils respond most appropriately. Teachers know their pupils well, and prepare pupils very thoroughly for external examinations. Pupils achieve high standards outside the classroom, especially in music and art.
- 2.2 The personal development of the pupils is excellent, fostered by the strong relationships they have with one another and with their teachers. Teachers show genuine care for the pupils and their well-being, but the operation of the current rewards and sanctions systems, for boarding and day pupils, lack balance and consistency in their operation, especially with regard to older pupils. Pupils develop confidence and speak easily with adults. They are courteous, and have a strong sense of right and wrong. Pupils feel that they can make a contribution through the school council, and that this has been effective in encouraging changes and improvements in their school. Pupils from other countries are easily assimilated into the school community. Arrangements for the welfare, safeguarding, health and safety of the pupils are good, but the recruitment checks have not been fully implemented with regard to 'gap' students who help in the boarding house. The facilities in the boarding areas are of excellent quality, following refurbishment in response to the previous ISI report.
- 2.3 The governance of the school is good; governors provide first-rate support for the teaching staff. The leadership and management of the school is good overall. The ethos of the school is clearly overseen by senior managers. The standards of the school have improved very significantly since the previous ISI inspection of January 2008, which reported recommendations in relation to governance, leadership and management and to pastoral care. Almost all of the matters raised in that report have been successfully tackled but those regarding the provision of a consistent approach to managing behaviour and the safe recruitment of staff are not yet fully implemented. The Ofsted boarding inspection of March 2011 included two recommendations in relation to dining accommodation and the timetable for pupils. Both recommendations have been carefully considered by the school with improvements made and further plans for future development. Many parents are supportive of the school as shown in their responses to the confidential pre-inspection questionnaire. However, a notable minority expressed criticism of academic and pastoral aspects of the school's provision. Inspection evidence does not support these views regarding the school's academic provision, which shows it to be excellent, but it does support perceptions of inconsistency in the operation of rewards and sanctions.

2.(b) Action points

(i) Compliance with regulatory requirements

(The range of the Independent School Standards Regulations is available through the link described in the Preface)

2.4 The school does not meet all the requirements of the Independent School Standards Regulations 2010, and therefore it is required to:

- implement the appropriate arrangements for appointment checks for all staff, including 'gap' students [Part 4, paragraph 19.(2)(c), under Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors], [National Minimum Standard 14.1, under Staff Recruitment and Checks on Other Adults].

2.5 The school does not meet all the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools 2011, as above.

(ii) Recommendation for further improvement

2.6 In addition to the above regulatory action point, the school is advised to make the following improvement.

1. Improve the rewards and sanctions systems for the school, including that for the boarders, and ensure staff use them in a consistent and positive manner.

3. THE QUALITY OF ACADEMIC AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS

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

- 3.1 The pupils' learning and achievements are excellent.
- 3.2 The school fulfils its aim of enabling the pupils to make full use of their abilities with great success. Pupils are highly articulate and speak well on a variety of topics. They listen to their teachers and one another carefully, read fluently and are skilled in writing expressively. In an information and communication technology (ICT) lesson, pupils read out with clarity and expression their summaries of a news story they had downloaded from the internet and reproduced on a word-processor. The pupils' numeracy skills are highly developed and they are able to apply them to real-life situations. Pupils enjoy doing scientific experiments and show good understanding of work previously covered, enabling them to think for themselves and apply their understanding in unfamiliar situations. Their reasoning skills and application of logical thought are excellent; this was particularly evident in discussion, for example, during a history lesson on myths and the Ride of the Valkyries. Their language skills are of a high standard and older pupils express themselves accurately in French. Through the introduction of a combination of French and Latin, classics are introduced in the junior year groups; it is of particular benefit to those with EAL.
- 3.3 Pupils express their outstanding creativity in many ways; high quality art is displayed around the school and music is a strength of the school. The pupils' excellent musical skills are most evident in the quality of the choristers' achievements, but these additionally inspire other pupils to sing well and to gain distinctions and merits in national instrumental music examinations. Skills in ICT are strong and are used particularly well for musical composition and graphic design, and also in some subjects for research; the pupils enjoy demonstrating their ability to use interactive whiteboards in lessons.
- 3.4 Pupils do not take national tests at the age of eleven, but on the evidence of lesson observations, scrutiny of the pupils' work and examination results their attainment is judged to be high relative to their abilities and ages. The pupils are prepared thoroughly for external examinations, and all gain places into highly selective senior day and boarding schools at the age of thirteen, a good number through scholarships in music, art and academia, and as all-rounders. This level of attainment indicates that all pupils make at least good progress. The most able pupils are often given tasks that challenge them fully, and this aids their excellent progress. Pupils with EAL or SEND progress well, due to staff awareness of their needs and the appropriate provision in lessons. Individual help in extra lessons for these pupils is also beneficial. Parents appreciate the high quality of the concerts and the drama productions performed by pupils of all ages. Pupils compete with reasonable success against other schools on the sports field.
- 3.5 The pupils are well motivated; they settle quickly to their work and respond enthusiastically in lessons. They concentrate on the task they are given, ask salient questions and offer solutions eagerly when questioned. They work effectively independently and collaboratively; for example, pupils worked enthusiastically, both on their own and in groups, to produce a wide range of three-dimensional solids from paper nets and polyhedra tiles in a mathematics lesson. The pupils' successes both inside and outside the classroom owe much to the respectful relationships they

have with the staff and the willingness of the staff to provide the support and encouragement in the classroom and through subject clinics.

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

- 3.6 The overall curriculum is excellent.
- 3.7 The curriculum has good breadth during the course of a school day and its organisation is tailored to provide an all-round education, as far as is possible, for both the choristers and the day pupils. The school's aim of providing a broad academic education is largely fulfilled for all pupils. The choristers lead a very full life, devoting much time to rehearsals and performances, and this inevitably precludes them from enjoying some of the out-of-class activities.
- 3.8 All the National Curriculum subjects are taught; with the younger pupils there is more emphasis on English, reading and drama than on mathematics. French is taught to all pupils and Latin from Year 6, with drama for those in Years 3 to 5. Since the previous inspection the provision for personal, social and health education (PSHCE) is much improved, with citizenship included. Games, including swimming, are timetabled for two afternoons each week.
- 3.9 The forms are streamed according to ability for all subjects in Years 6 to 8. The provision for pupils with SEND or EAL is good; they receive specialist, individual tuition and look forward to these lessons, feeling they are helpful. Class teachers are well aware of these pupils' needs and bear their difficulties in mind when preparing lessons.
- 3.10 An excellent range of activities is offered at lunch-times and after school; some offer effective extended challenges for the more able pupils. Apart from the three choirs, two orchestras and five instrumental groups, the activities include intellectual, creative and sporting ones. Some of these voluntary activities are popular, and in others the few pupils benefit from the close interaction with members of staff.
- 3.11 All pupils have the opportunity to enjoy representing their school in sports matches. Pupils of all ages take part in drama productions, which enable them to gain confidence from performing in public. Four-fifths of the pupils learn musical instruments, chosen from a wide range; many play in the informal concerts held throughout the year, with the most expert players delighting the audience in the end-of-year concert.
- 3.12 The educational experience of pupils is enhanced each year by visiting speakers and by a number of trips, some related to academic work and some for interest, including a one-day visit to France. In addition, pupils undertake residential trips, such as geography fieldwork on a Scottish island. In the past two years, pupils have attended a week-long soccer tournament in Spain, and the choristers toured America with the cathedral choir. The Year 8 leavers' programme includes a spiritual retreat and visits to places of interest, including an overnight stay in a country area.
- 3.13 Links with the local community are excellent. Members of the public attend and enjoy the many services at which the choristers sing, and the gallery choir (day pupils in Years 5 to 8) sings carols in three venues at Christmas. A special feature is the choristers' visits to ten maintained, primary schools each year to encourage their singing standards. Raising significant sums of money for two national charities brings a richness to life at the school, with fun-runs, swim-athons and auctions being

especially popular activities. In addition, the school council have initiated fund raising for a third charity.

3.(c) The contribution of teaching

- 3.14 The overall standard of teaching is excellent.
- 3.15 Teaching has improved significantly since the previous inspection. It helps pupils achieve their potential and prepares them for their continuing education, in line with the aims of the school. Teachers know their pupils extremely well. Detailed information about pupils is shared and taken into account when lessons are planned. Pupils benefit from the enthusiasm, commitment and good subject knowledge of their teachers, which fosters interest and participation in lessons at all levels. In a demanding science lesson, when asked to predict results from their knowledge of the reactivity series, the pupils responded with great concentration and understanding as they performed experiments. Teaching uses a variety of approaches and the pupils respond well, by staying on task and getting through a productive amount of work in the allotted lesson time. In a well-planned French lesson, activities included games, oral work and highly effective use of an interactive whiteboard. Pupils are often offered opportunities to think for themselves and to discuss and share their ideas with others; for example, pupils reasoned and analysed text in small groups in an English lesson and were able to articulate their views clearly.
- 3.16 Teaching uses praise and encouragement frequently, and this adds to the pupils' enjoyment and application. The most successful teaching is typified by a brisk pace, enthusiasm, encouragement, clear planning and an awareness of pupils of all abilities. The use of targeted questioning to draw out solutions from each individual at their level helps all to succeed.
- 3.17 Strong support is supplied for pupils with SEND; their individual education plans are reviewed half-yearly, and teachers are provided each week with targets and advice regarding these pupils. Resources of good quality are used well to motivate pupils; most classrooms have interactive whiteboards, and these are used to produce stimulating lessons, thus enthusing pupils and maintaining their interest. A variety of resources, including a glove puppet, were used to encourage pupils to listen attentively to newspaper articles and then to analyse them, before beginning their creative writing.
- 3.18 The detailed school marking policy is applied well. Marking is thorough and encourages pupils and, in the best examples, it includes targets for future improvement. Target lists, stuck to desks, are used effectively in Year 3 and 4 for teachers and pupils to focus on during lessons. A new data-tracking system and test structure, introduced since the previous inspection, is designed to aid the monitoring of progress and the dissemination of information about individual pupils' needs. Some staff make good use of this information to plan teaching but its use is not consistent. The data gives useful information about the pupils' all-round ability, but does not relate attainment in English and mathematics to national standards.

4. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

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

- 4.1 The personal development of the pupils is excellent.
- 4.2 By the time they leave the school at the age of thirteen, pupils are mature, courteous and caring, and display high levels of consideration for one another. They know how to behave and show respect for their teachers through good manners. This level of development is fully in accordance with the aims of the school. This represents a highly significant improvement since the previous inspection and meets the requirements in that report that pupils should have opportunities for responsibility and to appreciate other cultures.
- 4.3 The pupils' spiritual development is excellent. For example, some pupils acknowledge a profound spiritual experience in the weekly mass that is led by the gallery choir and the school chaplain in the cathedral. Pupils enjoy other spiritual experiences; for example, they reflect and pray in assemblies, and they use the opportunities provided in art and music to express their innermost feelings through images and musical compositions. Off-site retreats provide opportunities for the sacramental preparation of younger pupils, and older pupils value the short retreats they experience in the cathedral when they explore personal prayer and the importance of silence. The pupils' educational experience fosters their self-confidence and personal belief. Their self-esteem is aided by the presentation of commendations in assemblies, which acknowledge their hard work and outstanding achievements. The pupils feel encouraged and recognised by the praise of their teachers, and the issuing of badges when key milestones are reached.
- 4.4 The development of the pupils' moral awareness is exceptionally good. They know right from wrong, and are alert to any perceived injustice they encounter. The pupils show high levels of courtesy towards each other and to visitors, usually responding positively to the teachers' high expectations of good manners. Pupils exhibit a very strong appreciation and care for the wider community, as exemplified by their understanding of the causes and impact of homelessness and their work to raise funds for a neighbouring drop-in centre. The school council, which includes pupils of all ages, has engaged in ethical initiatives such as its decision to raise funds for a charity that supports people with a rare genetic skin condition.
- 4.5 The social development of the pupils is strong; during the inspection, the behaviour of pupils of all ages was exemplary. Senior pupils take on responsibilities within the school community with enthusiasm. Older pupils are given responsibility for helping younger pupils. A number of Year 8 pupils also take on various responsibilities such as head boy and his deputy, and take leading roles in the three houses and in the cathedral choir; they carry out their roles with pride and diligence.
- 4.6 The pupils' awareness of both western and other cultures is good. They develop a knowledge of their own culture through their active participation in musical and dramatic productions, and visits to museums and art galleries. Their awareness of other cultures has been enhanced by an Australian day, an assembly about the Chinese New Year and a study of world music and literature. The school's diverse community, both socially and culturally, helps pupils to learn to live harmoniously alongside those whose backgrounds are different from their own.

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

- 4.7 The pastoral care provided for the pupils is good.
- 4.8 The pastoral arrangements foster the pupils' personal development and academic achievement, in line with the school's aims. The form tutor is the main point of contact for a pupil, and they meet with their tutees three times each day in addition to any lessons taught. Relationships throughout the school are strong, with good relationships amongst the pupils, and between pupils and staff. Pupils are confident that they could turn to any member of the staff, both teaching and non-teaching, if they have a concern.
- 4.9 The school makes good provision for the health and well-being of the pupils, with eating habits and developing a healthy lifestyle emphasised in the PSHCE course. Meals are nutritious, appetising and well balanced. Within the school day, and in some extra-curricular activities, pupils acquire the habit of taking regular exercise. The school has a suitable plan to improve educational access for pupils with disabilities which meets the requirements of the previous inspection.
- 4.10 Effective communication systems are in place regarding pastoral issues; concerns are carefully recorded, along with the measures taken to deal with them. Since the previous inspection, the school has produced a written policy to prevent bullying, which meets the requirements of that report, and implemented appropriate procedures. Pupils report that there are no serious incidents, and that staff deal rapidly and effectively with any minor disagreements. The arrangements for promoting good behaviour are well understood by pupils and consist of a system of rewards and sanctions. A number of pupils in Years 5 to 8, in response to questionnaires, felt that there are inconsistencies in the way the system operates, which results in a perceived imbalance between sanctions and rewards, and these views were confirmed in interviews with pupils. Inspection evidence supports this perception; the imbalance is brought about by it apparently being much harder for older pupils to gain merits than demerits.
- 4.11 Pupils are regularly consulted by staff about aspects of their lives within the school, and their ideas and suggestions are sought formally through regular tutorial group meetings and informally through discussions with individual staff. Pupils share their ideas for whole-school development through the school council, which has elected representatives from every class. The council has been successful in bringing about changes in the playground.

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

- 4.12 The provision the school makes for the welfare, health and safety of its pupils is good.
- 4.13 Considerable progress has been made in improving the weaknesses highlighted in the last ISI report. Safe recruitment procedures are robustly followed in most cases, although recent procedures have omitted checks on 'gap' students helping in the boarding areas; the school has initiated action that aims to rectify this swiftly. All staff receive good quality child protection training, which is updated appropriately. The safeguarding policy and procedures are well understood within the school, largely meeting the requirements of the previous inspection.
- 4.14 Health and safety concerns are taken seriously by the staff who are diligent in their observation and awareness of any potential hazards. All necessary measures are

taken to reduce risks from fire and other hazards, and procedures and record keeping in this area, are exemplary. Risk assessments are carried out efficiently, both within the school and for external trips; they are very thorough, and all feasible contingencies are covered in detail. The two highly effective health and safety committees (one to deal with academic matters, the other non-academic ones) meet regularly to review all relevant documentation and concerns; urgent needs are attended to speedily. The requirements of the previous report in this area, and regarding the number of washrooms, have been met.

- 4.15 Many members of staff are trained in first-aid and the services of the medical staff are on hand for both day and boarding pupils. Since the previous inspection, new break time arrangements have been implemented, and new playground equipment installed, which has greatly enhanced safety outdoors. The school's admission and attendance registers are suitably maintained and correctly stored.

4.(d) The quality of boarding

- 4.16 The quality of boarding in the school is good.
- 4.17 Outcomes for boarders are excellent and their personal development is well promoted by their boarding experience. Choristers are extremely proud of the contribution they make to the cathedral and school community as members of the choir, and are cheerful, confident, self-reliant and tolerant. They have pleasant and constructive relationships with one another, and with the boarding staff, valuing the friendships they make and enjoying their interaction with friends. Those pupils with SEND enjoy boarding, and feel that they are both well supported and respected as individuals. Those boarders who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire were most positive about all areas of boarding life; those spoken to during the inspection were confident that their views are considered.
- 4.18 Boarding accommodation is of a high standard; it is warm, comfortable and spacious, with attractive and well-maintained facilities, including a common room and well-appointed washroom provision. This is a result of considerable refurbishment since the previous ISI inspection. Access to boarding areas is suitably controlled. A variety of activities is provided in the evenings. These, whilst encouraging the development of many different skills, allow for self-directed time and freedom of choice. Those who want a period of quiet during the day can go to their dormitory. Much of the boarders' time each Sunday is spent preparing for and singing in services in the cathedral, and they look forward to the visits to places of interest, such as a film museum, that are arranged for them on Saturdays. The catering staff have an excellent understanding of what makes a balanced and nutritious meal. Food is plentiful and varied, accommodating individual dietary needs. The well-resourced medical centre is overseen by appropriately-trained staff. Boarders are able to maintain regular contact with their families, through mid-week and weekend visits by relatives, as well as telephone calls and e-mails. The school communicates well, in a number of ways, with parents, carers and guardians.
- 4.19 Arrangements to ensure the welfare and safeguarding of the boarders are sound. Choristers receive high levels of personal support from staff and this is a strength of the school. They feel safe within the boarding community and are unanimous in their confidence that they know who to turn to if they have any concerns. In addition to school staff, boarders can receive support from a governor who has especial responsibility for boarding, an independent listener, and the chaplain. Older boarders help younger ones. The school's safeguarding policy is well implemented

in most areas, including staff training. It has not been fully implemented recently in terms of the requirement to check 'gap' students resident in the boarding house; the school has moved swiftly to rectify this. The school's anti-bullying procedures are clear, with underlying principles based upon respect, tolerance and consideration for the feelings and comfort of others. Boarders overwhelmingly report no experience of bullying. The policy and procedures to promote good behaviour are securely in place and a suitable log records the sanctions given. Boarders felt, in discussion, that these arrangements are not operated consistently with regard to the balance of rewards and sanctions. Inspection evidence supports this view. All risks for boarders, including those of fire, have been assessed and fire practices are held regularly out of teaching time. Links between boarding and academic staff are excellent, and concerns and issues relating to boarders are discussed at both staff and pastoral meetings.

- 4.20 The effectiveness of the leadership and management of boarding is good, successfully fulfilling the boarding aims of the school. The boarding house is well run, with pupils and staff knowing what is expected of them; the dedicated boarding staff are clearly aware of the distinctive demands made upon choristers and work tirelessly to ensure their well-being. Managers and staff are confident in maintaining high standards of care and continue to consider ways to improve. New staff receive thorough induction and an on-going training programme ensures that staff are fully conversant with boarding practice and regulatory matters. The tutors, who provide regular supervision and support for the boarders, enjoy their pastoral role in addition to their daytime teaching duties. In their responses to the parental questionnaires, parents were almost unanimously appreciative of the care and support their sons receive, and inspection evidence supports this view of the provision. The school has responded well to the recommendations from the previous Ofsted boarding inspection.

5. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

5.(a) The quality of governance

- 5.1 The governance of the school is good.
- 5.2 The governance of the school has been strengthened since the previous inspection; some aspects are now excellent. The governing body meets each term, as do the sub-committees to consider financial and pastoral matters, and those for music and academic matters meet annually. The finance committee sets annual budgets and considers matters in considerable detail. Several senior staff are represented on the pastoral and academic committees, sometimes making presentations to those committees. Governors are very well informed about the school. Individual governors are nominated to liaise with staff regarding health and safety, child protection, chorister welfare, and day pupil welfare; they undertake these special responsibilities diligently and provide good information for other governors. Governors exercise collective oversight of these areas well overall, including an annual review of child protection procedures, although there have been shortcomings in the timely checking of some staff appointments and of 'gap' students from overseas.
- 5.3 Governors take very seriously their role of maintaining the ethos and quality of the school, in accordance with its aims. Governors have carefully considered the options for the future of the school and this has resulted in the successful introduction of the Year 3 class. Communication between the chairman and senior staff is strong, strengthened by twice-weekly meetings, and this results in exceptionally well-informed advice about the school, and knowledge of the staff as individuals. The governors have considerable experience of finance, law, primary and secondary education; this enables them to praise, advise and question senior staff effectively on most subjects.

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

- 5.4 The leadership and management of the school are good.
- 5.5 Strong leadership of the school sets a high moral tone, encouraging every pupil to give of his best. Leadership has ensured considerable improvements in the academic and pastoral aspects of the school since the previous inspection, aided by an effective, clearly defined management structure. These improvements have successfully tackled the recommendations of that report which have now been mostly met in full, whilst retaining the special qualities of the school; arrangements to promote good behaviour are not yet consistently implemented. The leadership and staff are united in their desire to provide a first-class education for their pupils and to engender an atmosphere in which they may thrive. Staff work hard to support one another and their pupils.
- 5.6 Much responsibility is delegated to four senior managers, and they work exceptionally well and supportively with the headmaster to raise standards in their areas of responsibility. The senior management team meets each week and works well together. With the small number of staff, the roles of heads of department focus mostly on management issues, including the preparation and operation of good quality departmental handbooks; monitoring of teaching and marking by senior

leaders is diligent, although not all initiatives, such as those on use of assessment data, are fully implemented as yet. The staff benefit from arrangements made for them to observe their colleagues teaching twice a term, which has helped raise standards. Staff are kept well informed about issues to do with pupils and the general running of the school through regular briefings and meetings, including opportunities to discuss particular aspects of the school in detail. The routine, day-to-day administration of the school is efficient. Since the previous inspection, the school has produced a comprehensive development plan that covers each aspect of the school.

- 5.7 Since the previous inspection, the school has introduced a rigorous staff appraisal system which meets the recommendation of that report. Staff feel their appraisals have been helpful and the system identifies their training needs. In-service training occurs for the whole staff before the start of all terms and virtually all staff have attended a number of individual, external courses. New teachers are helped to adapt to the school by having an introductory day in the school, and by a mentor advising them during their first year. Appropriate arrangements are made for newly qualified teachers, with a suitably reduced timetable, and an experienced member of staff monitors their progress. The required checks are carried out on staff, governors and volunteers and recorded appropriately, with the exception of those already indicated.
- 5.8 The non-academic staff support the school exceptionally well and, by their efficiency and pleasant demeanour, they contribute fully to the atmosphere of the school. Parents and visitors appreciate the warm and professional welcome they receive from the office staff, and the outstanding state of the buildings and grounds.
- 5.9 The school has good links with parents. The parents who completed the pre-inspection questionnaire were very pleased with the school's policies and the information provided to them. Some very positive comments were received. A significant minority, especially amongst parents of pupils in Years 7 and 8, expressed reservations about various aspects of the school; inspection evidence does not support these views regarding academic standards, but supports concerns about the consistency with which rewards and sanctions are applied.
- 5.10 Since the previous inspection, many improvements in communications with parents have been introduced and parents are now exceptionally well informed by the weekly newsletters and the website about both future events and the achievements of the school and its pupils. Parents of pupils and prospective pupils receive all required information. New parents receive a comprehensive handbook, and are invited to a reception to meet the staff and governors.
- 5.11 The written reports received by parents each term are usually excellent, highlighting individual strengths and weaknesses and the best include targets for improvement; however, in some subjects, reports for pupils in the same class lack sufficient individualisation. Parents also receive each half term their child's effort and achievement grades in each subject, together with comments from the form tutor. Parental consultations about their children's progress are held once a year. In these ways, parents are kept well informed about their child's progress.
- 5.12 Form tutors invite parents to a meeting at the beginning of the academic year to discuss the curriculum and the expectations for the coming year. A recent presentation to parents and pupils about the dangers and harm done by cyber

bullying was well attended. The headmaster discusses suitable senior schools for pupils with individual parents.

5.13 Informal contact with parents is frequent before and after school each day. Parents are also able to communicate with staff by e-mail and urgent messages can be sent to parents through text messages. The school has a suitable complaints procedure. When parents have concerns, they are dealt with professionally, with detailed notes of meetings retained.

5.14 Parents provide strong support for the school, attending concerts and plays. Parents also assist with make-up and costumes for drama productions, and some talk to pupils in assemblies about their lives. A parents' committee is very active and organises a variety of social events; these raise very significant sums of money for school resources, such as the interactive whiteboards and the improvements to the playground. Recently, a highly successful, evening event raised money towards improving the refectory.

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

Follow up visit

School:	Westminster Cathedral Choir School		
Head:	Mr. Neil McLaughlan		
DfE number:	213/6197		
Association:	IAPS	Type/Faith:	R.C.
Age range:	7 to 13	Gender:	Boys
Last inspected:	6 th March to 9 th March 2012		
Inspectors:	P.R.Jones, J.Hamilton		
Date of visit:	18 th September 2012		

1. Context of the school

Westminster Cathedral Choir School was founded in 1902, the original prime purpose, still intact, being to educate the choristers of Westminster Cathedral. It is now a day and boarding school for boys aged seven to thirteen years. Most pupils come from professional families living within 30 miles of the school, and have been born in the UK; about a quarter of the pupils originate from foreign countries, with the largest grouping coming from Italy. Most pupils join the school at seven or eight years of age, but pupils can enter at any age if places are available. As well as aiming to supply choristers for a world-class choir for Westminster Cathedral, the school's aims are to nurture in each child Catholic values, where good behaviour is the norm, and to provide a broad, outstanding and demanding academic education, together with many extra-curricular activities, including a range of sports and excellent musical opportunities for all pupils, whilst preparing pupils for continuing education through responsibility, experience and opportunity.

The school is in a London city centre location adjacent to Westminster Cathedral. The school site includes a large outdoor recreation area.

The school currently has 158 pupils of whom 130 are day pupils; the 28 choristers are full boarders. There are 110 boys aged 5-11 and 48 aged 12-13. Day boys are assessed for entry in the January before they seek to join the school, and sit papers in English, mathematics and general reasoning. Admission for entry as a boarding chorister follows informal and formal voice trials with the master of music at Westminster Cathedral, and academic assessments in the school. Most pupils continue until the age of 13 before proceeding to a wide range of independent day and boarding schools.

The school's proprietors are the Westminster RC Diocesan Trust. The Trust delegates responsibility for oversight of the school to a governing body.

Nine pupils receive extra specialist help because they do not have English as their first language (EAL). Fifteen pupils receive specialist individual help for their learning difficulties (SEND). No pupil has a statement of special educational need. Standardised tests show the pupils' average ability to be above the national average, with a fairly wide range of ability represented in the present cohort. A few pupils have ability below the national average, and one in seven has ability well above this average.

2. Purpose of the visit

This was a follow-up visit at the request of the school to report on the school's progress towards meeting the action points and recommendations arising from the Integrated inspection of 6th to 9th March 2012. The action points from that inspection were as follows:

Action points

(i) Compliance with regulatory requirements

(The range of the Independent School Standards Regulations is available through the link described in the Preface)

The school does not meet all the requirements of the Independent School Standards Regulations 2010, and therefore it is required to:

- implement the appropriate arrangements for appointment checks for all staff, including 'gap' students [Part 4, paragraph 19.(2)(c), under Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors], [National Minimum Standard 14.1, under Staff Recruitment and Checks on Other Adults].*

The school does not meet all the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools 2011, for the same reason as above.

(ii) Recommendation for further improvement

In addition to the above regulatory action point, the school is advised to make the following improvement.

- 1. Improve the rewards and sanctions systems for the school, including that for the boarders, and ensure staff use them in a consistent and positive manner.*

3. Summary of evidence

- Scrutiny of the school's Action Plan
- Check on the Single Central register of appointments;
- Check on files of staff employed since March 2012.
- Interviews with headteacher, deputy headteacher, head of boarding, senior member of staff (Designated Senior Person for Safeguarding) with responsibility for staff appointment procedures and checks, administrator i/c single central register administration;
- Interviews with 18 pupils from Years 6, 7 and 8 (6 from each year, 18 in total, boys chosen to represent a mixture of new and well-established boys);
- Guided tour and discussion of the school, including boarding facilities, with four boys from Years 7 and 8 (two boys per inspector on separate tours, boys chosen at random by inspectors);
- Two lesson observations (Y8 Sc, Y5 Music);
- Meeting with Chair of Governing Body;
- Feedback meeting to SMT and Chair of GB.

4. Inspection findings

Compliance with regulatory requirements

Compliance with Independent School Standards Regulations 2010 [Part 4 paragraph 19.2(c)] and National Minimum Standard 14.1:

The school now implements appropriate checks for all staff, including 'gap' students. Since the time of the last inspection the school has put in place robust measures to ensure that suitable and timely checks are made prior to all staff appointments. List 99 and CRB checks are made through an independent agency, and the school no longer uses its previous source for checking and advice. Appointments are accurately recorded in the SCR. Checks on 'gap' students are fully in place. The school has established suitable procedures whereby CRB forms are sent in advance to the institution from which all overseas 'gap' students come (St. Joseph's College, Sydney) to allow clearance to be obtained before their arrival at Westminster.

Recommendation for further improvement

Improve the rewards and sanctions systems for the school, including that for the boarders, and ensure staff use them in a consistent and positive manner:

Since the time of the last inspection, the school has thoroughly reviewed its policies on rewards and sanctions, taking good account of the views of day pupils and boarders. It has put in place a well-founded policy designed to motivate the boys, with an emphasis on rewarding positive achievements in academic performance, behaviour and personal organisation. The new policy is designed to ensure that older boys (Years 6, 7 and 8) are able to fairly achieve merits through a separate system which takes proper account of the complexity of the work they do, and gives them parity of reward with younger pupils. The system allows for greater recognition of achievement through badges, certificates and prizes, as well as special mentions in whole-school assemblies and notes to parents. The award of merits to individuals, classes and houses is recognised by the system. Particular attention has been given to ensuring that the achievement of boarders is fully recognised.

The school has also made significant changes to its system of sanctions. For boarding staff, permission to give demerits has, since shortly after the previous inspection, been restricted solely to the housemaster or housemistress on duty. The policy sets out who may give sanctions and the reasons for which they are applied, and states the importance of giving boys a warning to allow them to modify their behaviour before applying sanctions.

All members of staff have received training in the use of the new rewards and sanctions system, a whole-school assembly has informed the boys of the system and a poster campaign has been used to remind the school community of the new approach. The school now collects data to identify patterns of rewards and sanctions, and has put measures in place to monitor the application of the system to ensure that it is applied fairly.

The boys know about the new rewards and sanctions system and say that it is a great improvement on the previous arrangement. They see the new system as positive and motivating, allowing older boys to gain merits more readily, better reflecting their achievements. They enjoy the mix of individual, class and house competition for merits, and relish the prospect it brings of tangible prizes such as vouchers for pizzas. Boarders in particular note the significant reduction in the number of demerits being handed out and value the fact that the new system better reflects the positive aspects of their own personal development. Boys value the provision the new system makes for warnings to be issued before sanctions are applied. They say it allows them to think about and modify their behaviour. The boys say that the new system motivates them and allows them to be more confident that rewards and sanctions will be applied fairly.

Evidence from a small sample of lesson observations indicated that behaviour was excellent, and that the merit system was being used positively to motivate pupils.

The school now meets in full the Independent School Standards Regulations and National Minimum Standards for Boarding schools 2011, including the implementation of appropriate arrangements for appointment checks for all staff, including 'gap' students [Part 4, paragraph 19.(2)(c), under Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors], [National Minimum Standard 14.1, under Staff Recruitment and Checks on Other Adults].

The school has successfully met the recommendation to improve the rewards and sanctions systems for the school, including that for the boarders, and ensure staff use them in a consistent and positive manner. The inspection demonstrates the commitment of governors and leaders to excellent standards in all aspects of the school.