

Harris Westminster Sixth Form

Free school

Inspection dates

4–6 October 2016

| Overall effectiveness | | Outstanding | |
|--|--------------------|--------------------------|--------------------|
| Effectiveness of leadership and management | Outstanding | Study programmes | Outstanding |
| Quality of teaching, learning and assessment | Outstanding | | |
| Personal development, behaviour and welfare | Outstanding | | |
| Outcomes for learners | Outstanding | | |
| Overall effectiveness at previous inspection | | Not previously inspected | |

Summary of key findings

This is an outstanding provider

- Governors and senior leaders have set a clear mission and purpose for the school, which, through the creative vision of the principal, has resulted in an environment in which students thrive within a community of scholars.
- The principal, senior leaders and staff imbue into their students a passion for learning and the pursuit of academic excellence; students respond enthusiastically to the challenges and aspirations that staff set for them.
- The school receives excellent support in equal measure from its partnerships with the Harris Federation and Westminster School to promote students' learning, and from Westminster Abbey staff to develop students' sense of purpose and community.
- Governors have a thorough understanding of the school and wholeheartedly support its mission and values; they provide excellent challenge to the leadership team to hold them to account.
- Teachers are well qualified, enthusiastic and set and achieve very high standards for their students; they are unrelenting in their pursuit of teaching excellence.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are outstanding and students develop, across all the subjects they take, a consistent approach to learning through which they rapidly deepen their understanding of topics taught.
- Students have a profound understanding and appreciation of how their education is preparing them for future success.
- Students make excellent progress in their learning; in the majority of subjects their work is of a higher standard than is expected of them given their prior attainment.
- A high proportion of students gain places at higher education, with around half going to prestigious universities and six going to Oxford or Cambridge.
- Students benefit from a wide range of thoughtfully designed activities that successfully extend their learning and promote their interest in the world around them; they are very well informed about a wide range of topical and sensitive issues, which they discuss even-handedly and without bias.
- Students' behaviour is exemplary; they adhere to high standards of professional presentation in their appearance, behaviour and attitude.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Harris Westminster Sixth Form opened in 2014 and is a free school for students aged 16 to 18. The school is part of the Harris Federation and was formed in partnership with Westminster School. Although located within the London Borough of Westminster, the school recruits students from all over the city from both inner and outer London boroughs. The school is selective; applicants are required to sit an entrance examination and interview, and places are prioritised for students from deprived backgrounds. Over a third of students received free school meals when they were at school. All students are on an academic study programme made up of A level and Cambridge Pre-U qualifications. At the time of the inspection, there were approximately 500 students, 250 in each year of study.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- In order to maintain the high standard of teaching, learning and assessment as the school grows and as staff numbers increase, managers should record more precisely in their quality improvement action plans the timelines for making improvements and the measures used to evaluate the impact of their actions.
- Managers and teachers should continue to monitor closely, and put in place actions to improve the performance of different groups of students, in order to improve further the progress made by students who were eligible for free school meals when at school, those who arrive at the sixth form with the highest GCSE attainment, and those who need extra support to achieve.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- The school was established along strong ideological lines, formed by the leaders at the Harris Federation and Westminster School, to provide students from unprivileged and deprived backgrounds with an education that would enable them to gain access to the best available higher education. This purpose underpins all the work of the school and, through the creative vision of the principal, has become an environment in which students thrive within a community of scholars. The principal, senior leaders and staff imbue in their students a passion for learning and the pursuit of academic excellence. Students respond enthusiastically to the challenges and aspirations that staff set for them and, as a consequence, achieve very well and go on to university.
- The school receives excellent support in equal measure from its partnerships with the Harris Federation and Westminster School to promote students' learning. Both partners provide extensive support to the school leaders and staff, for example through mentorship, coaching of new staff and the close and frequent liaison between subject teachers.
- Central to the development of the curriculum and to the approach to teaching is the strong partnership between the school's leaders and those at Westminster School. Between them, they have created an academic curriculum, formed of A level and Cambridge Pre-U qualifications, focused on those subjects that are most valued by prestigious universities for entrance onto their degree programmes. In addition, through the link with Westminster School, students are able to study classical languages, art history, drama and German.
- Students' extra-curricular learning is enhanced by the excellent involvement of leaders and staff at Westminster Abbey. For example, through regular assemblies at St Margaret's Church students consolidate their understanding of the school's ethos and develop a sense of community, responsibility and independence.
- Managers evaluate in fine detail the quality of provision and focus extremely well on what teachers do and do not do well. Senior leaders also make effective use of feedback from students via the weekly principal's meetings with the students' elected senate. Teachers reflect well on the feedback they receive following observations of lessons. Managers recognise that in developing their observation, appraisal and quality improvement schemes, they have yet to ensure that they fully implement improvement actions, and measure the impact of these in raising standards further.
- Managers have developed excellent systems to monitor the progress of their students. They record in detail the progress students make relative to their starting points and monitor closely the performance of students from different backgrounds and of different abilities. Managers have comprehensive information about where students go once they leave the school, including for the few who do not complete their course.

The governance of the provider

- Governance at the school is outstanding. The governing body is primarily made up of representatives from the Harris Federation and Westminster School, who have extensive experience of education and provide highly effective expertise to the leadership team. Governors wholeheartedly support the school's mission and values.
- The principal provides governors with detailed reports through which they understand

fully the school's strengths, areas for improvement and the performance of students. Governors scrutinise these reports carefully and provide excellent and detailed challenge to the leadership team to hold them to account.

- Governors take a keen interest in students' experiences and through their links to different subjects maintain a good awareness of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, and of students' experiences.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Managers make very effective use of Harris Federation resources to set the school's policies and procedures relating to safeguarding and the 'Prevent' duty, which are up to date and fit for purpose.
- Managers maintain thorough records for all staff. Managers responsible for staff recruitment are suitably trained and the designated safeguarding lead and safeguarding officers have completed training at levels 4 and 3 respectively. Detailed records are kept of the regular staff and governor training for safeguarding.
- Managers keep accurate records of all safeguarding related incidents and respond quickly and effectively to the few issues that arise. Managers have a good overview of individual students, in particular the most vulnerable, and provide students with effective help when they need it. Through their liaison with the police, managers are up to date with the possible threats that students face and ensure that staff and students complete suitable training, including their understanding of the dangers of extremism and radicalisation.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- Leaders, managers and teachers are unrelenting in their pursuit of outstanding teaching. They have implemented a very well-defined strategy for teaching, learning and assessment and teachers are clear about the expectations placed upon them. This results in considerable uniformity in the high quality of teaching and assessment, and ensures that students develop, across all the subjects they take, a consistent approach to learning through which they rapidly deepen their understanding of topics taught.
- Teachers are well qualified, enthusiastic and achieve very high standards for their students. Teachers and students share a keen sense of inquiry and lessons are characterised by a mutual interest in the subjects. Teachers use questions expertly to provide a structure and purpose to students' learning. For example, in a maths lesson on the use of quadratic equations, students were set the task to consider whether a parabola always has a line of symmetry.
- Teachers have very high expectations of students and in lessons provide the academic thoroughness that the students, who are high-achieving and motivated, enjoy. They help students to develop a range of skills required to be successful scholars. For example, in a politics lesson students read and noted information on the Labour Party's constitutional reforms, then fed back very effectively to their peers in a group activity.
- Teachers use their excellent subject knowledge expertly to interest and motivate their students. Teachers read widely, and students follow their example. Teachers frequently make links from one subject to another and, as a result, students are able to apply their learning across a range of subjects, which helps to equip them for their next steps to university. For example, students in a history class on reactions to the French Revolution were able to incorporate their knowledge of Burke, learned in politics lessons, into a lively debate about Whig and Tory ideas.

- Students are encouraged very successfully to develop their use of mathematics and English skills. Students have an excellent command of the technical language of their subjects and use it with confidence and accuracy. For example, in a discussion on Beckett's 'Waiting for Godot', students evaluated with intelligence the author's use of bathos and antiphrasis.
- Teachers and students have a strong and sustained focus on learning, both in and out of the classroom. While there is an especially singular focus on subject knowledge and achievement, there is also a successful focus on students' wider development. Students are set, and complete, homework in each subject at least once every week. Teachers mark the work quickly and provide detailed feedback through which students are able to make improvements.
- Students attend extra subject-specific workshops each week where they work collaboratively with their peers, with the support of their teachers, to develop their knowledge of their subject. They use a wide variety of sources including the library very well to extend their own learning.
- Staff assess students' academic levels accurately when they start their course. They set appropriate targets and monitor students' progress closely to help them achieve high standards in their work and aspirations. The identification of the few learners who need extra help to succeed, such as students with dyslexia, is thorough. However, teachers' tracking and monitoring of the adjustments that they make and the impact of the additional support that students receive in lessons is less precise.
- Every six weeks, through a well thought out and rigorous assessment process, teachers evaluate in detail the progress that students make in their studies and in relation to their targets. Teachers use their knowledge of students' progress to plan lessons which closely match the gaps in students' knowledge. Students strive for excellence in their work by acting positively on their teachers' feedback following assessments to develop their subject knowledge and critical thinking skills.
- Teachers are very successful at helping students to understand social diversity and to be inquisitive about, and respectful of, other people. For example, in modern foreign language lessons students discussed accents used in different cultures and explored the origins of New York Jewish accents.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

- Students have a profound understanding and appreciation of how their education is preparing them for future success. Students work cooperatively and well with others in lessons and through the student-led clubs and societies. They respond positively to the pressure, from both peers and teachers, which is a natural consequence of studying in a highly aspirational environment. They develop excellent study skills and habits which enable them to thrive within a culture of high expectations.
- Students develop outstanding skills to prepare them for future study and for work. Students' behaviour both in and out of lessons is exemplary. They are polite and well mannered and respect their peers and all staff. Students wear business dress, uphold excellent standards in attendance and punctuality, work well with each other and their teachers and have excellent presentation skills.
- Standards of students' work are very high. Students strive for continuous improvement and they encourage each other to do the same. They take notes in lessons, organise their

work very well, present homework neatly and on time and apply themselves very well to tasks set in lessons. Students take excellent account of the feedback they receive from their peers in subject-based societies and act on it to raise the standard of their work further.

- Students benefit from an extensive range of thoughtfully designed activities that successfully extend their learning and promote their interest in the world around them. As a result, students are very well informed about a wide range of topical and sensitive issues, which they discuss even-handedly and without bias. Teacher-led sessions, which develop students' cultural perspectives, are extensive, well managed and promote students' wider learning highly effectively.
- Societies, which are run by students, are extremely well attended and highly successful in raising awareness of a wide variety of aspects of a subject, for example 'gene editing' in the biomedical society. Managers are aware that a small minority of students' awareness of the 'Prevent' duty and its detail concerning the risks associated with the threat of radicalisation and extremism is, as yet, underdeveloped, and have plans to provide further training on this subject.
- Students make good progress in the development of skills for future jobs. Where appropriate, students complete work experience, for example those who wish to study medicine complete placements to develop an understanding of what it is like to have a career in this field. They use this knowledge to confirm their goals and aspirations.
- Students receive excellent support and guidance to prepare them for university, in conjunction with staff and students at Westminster School, and very high aspirations are set to attend institutions that have very challenging entry requirements. Currently around a third of Year 13 students are applying for entry to Oxford or Cambridge University.
- Students develop a good understanding of British values, which are successfully promoted in a variety of ways, including through taught sessions, the exploration of topical and relevant issues in assemblies, in subject societies and through vigorous debate. For example, students in the debating society discussed the tensions between the right to free speech and the dangers of 'hate speech' powerfully and persuasively.
- Students have a good understanding of how to stay safe. They feel safe in the school and in the surrounding area and demonstrate behaviour that promotes their own and others' personal safety.

Outcomes for learners

Outstanding

- Leaders and managers have planned the sixth-form curriculum to be taught over two years, with AS level examinations at the end of year one taken only in subjects where a linear two-year course is not yet available. The proportion of students who complete the two years of study is high. In 2016 all but one of these students achieved A-level or Pre-U qualifications in three subjects and around a third achieved four.
- For the six subjects in which Year 12 students took AS-level examinations in 2016, the progress that students made was excellent and the proportion who achieved top grades was very high. Teachers' assessment of students at the end of Year 12 in the subjects for which public examinations were not taken shows them to have made excellent progress in most subjects.
- The first cohort of students to complete their two years of sixth-form study since the school opened in 2014 made good progress relative to their prior attainment. A high

proportion of students achieved grades A*, A or B, although this is variable across subjects. For example, it is very high in modern foreign languages, English and geography, but lower, although remaining high, in chemistry, physics, economics and further mathematics.

- Students' work is of a very high standard and often exceeds expectations. Student's written presentation of work is excellent and they take part in debates in lessons and societies in a very sophisticated way.
- Managers evaluate carefully the performance of different groups of students with regard to both their progress and attainment. While most students achieve or exceed the grades expected of them, those with lower GCSE grades make better progress than those with higher grades. Students from a Black African heritage, and those who received free school meals when at school, perform slightly less well than their peers.
- Students are prepared extremely well for higher education. A very high proportion of students go to university, with around half gaining places at prestigious universities and six going to Oxford or Cambridge.

Provider details

| | |
|---|--|
| Unique reference number | 140939 |
| Type of provider | Free school |
| Age range of learners | 16–18 |
| Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year | 400 |
| Principal/CEO | James Handscombe |
| Telephone number | 020 3772 4555 |
| Website | www.harriswestminstersixthform.org.uk/ |

Provider information at the time of the inspection

| Main course or learning programme level | Level 1 or below | | Level 2 | | Level 3 | | Level 4 or above | |
|---|--------------------------|-----|----------|-----|---------|-----|------------------|-----|
| | 16–18 | 19+ | 16–18 | 19+ | 16–18 | 19+ | 16–18 | 19+ |
| Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships) | - | - | - | - | 500 | - | - | - |
| Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age | Intermediate | | Advanced | | Higher | | | |
| | 16–18 | 19+ | 16–18 | 19+ | 16–18 | 19+ | | |
| | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Number of traineeships | 16–19 | | 19+ | | Total | | | |
| | | | | | | | | |
| | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Number of learners aged 14 to 16 | - | | | | | | | |
| Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding | - | | | | | | | |
| Funding received from: | Education Funding Agency | | | | | | | |
| At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors: | - | | | | | | | |

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the principal, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans. Inspectors used group and individual interviews and online questionnaires to gather the views of students; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions and assessments and scrutinised students' work. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

Inspection team

| | |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Rieks Drijver, lead inspector | Her Majesty's Inspector |
| Philip Elliott | Ofsted Inspector |
| Kimberley Railton | Ofsted Inspector |
| Jill Arnold | Ofsted Inspector |

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