



The Westminster School

Inspection Report - Amended

Unique Reference Number 132233
Local Authority Sandwell
Inspection number 293994
Inspection dates 12–13 September 2006
Reporting inspector Michael Megee

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

Type of school	Special	School address	Westminster Road
School category	Community special		West Bromwich
Age range of pupils	11–19		Sandwell B71 2JN
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	0121 5882421
Number on roll (school)	111	Fax number	0121 5885451
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	C Jackson
		Headteacher	D Williams
Date of previous school inspection	23 September 2002		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–19	12–13 September 2006	293994

Amended Report Addendum

Report updated to resolve formatting inconsistency

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The Westminster School is a special school that serves pupils with moderate learning difficulties across the borough of Sandwell. Pupils' overall level of attainment on starting school has fallen recently and is exceptionally low. In addition to their learning difficulties, many pupils have social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, and there is a small group of pupils who have autism. A very small number also have physical difficulties or visual or hearing impairment. Many pupils have been excluded from their previous schools, or have been poor attenders. There are twice as many boys as girls. About one quarter of the pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds. Most of these pupils are of Indian or Pakistani heritage. The school opened in 2000, following the closure of five special schools. The reorganisation has resulted in continuing difficulties in the recruitment and retention of staff, and in the modernisation of the accommodation.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The Westminster School is a good, caring school that provides an effective individualised education for its pupils. The school and the parents agree with this overall judgement. Pupils enjoy coming to school. Their attendance, behaviour and attitudes to learning are good and these aspects of personal development, along with their caring attitudes to one another, contribute significantly to their achievements.

Pupils arrive at the school with very low attainment levels. Once at the school, their progress takes off and they achieve well right through their time at the school. This is because teaching is good and work is well matched to pupils' individual needs. The school fosters excellent relationships with its parents, other schools and colleges, training providers and local employers. These are used very effectively to the benefit of the pupils and are a real strength of the school. As a consequence, the pupils are very well prepared for the future and almost all successfully move on to further training or employment.

All staff work hard together and give good individual support and academic guidance so that pupils know what to do next to improve. The school makes good arrangements for reducing risk and ensuring pupils' safety. As a consequence pupils feel relaxed and secure. Although the curriculum is good and supports learning well, there is too little time given to physical education (PE). This restricts pupils' progress in the subject and reduces their opportunities to keep fit and healthy.

Leadership and management of the school are good. As a result of the strong leadership of the headteacher and her senior staff, the school has made good progress since the last inspection and has a good capacity to improve further. All leaders and governors contribute well to the school's success. This is despite continuing difficulties in staffing and accommodation which limit the opportunities for pupils to make good progress in subjects like information and communication technology (ICT), and in practical aspects of other subjects such as design and technology.

What the school should do to improve further

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- Ensure that pupils have frequent opportunities for regular exercise and physical education.
- Raise standards in ICT and practical aspects of other subjects by improving the accommodation and resources available to teachers and pupils.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils say that they achieve well because the teachers always listen to them and help them when they need it. Pupils' standards throughout their education remain exceptionally low for their age because of their learning difficulties. Once at the school, pupils make good progress. This is apparent both in their past work and in their lessons.

The pupils work hard to achieve the challenging targets they are set. This is because individual programmes of work are carefully planned on the basis of a careful assessment of pupils' needs. Consequently pupils experience frequent success and rapidly gain the confidence they need to meet ever greater challenges. Pupils with autism are supported effectively by specialised teaching in a well organised environment so that their progress is as good as everyone else's.

Pupils make particularly good progress in literacy, numeracy, science, art, work-related learning, personal, social and health and citizenship education, and Punjabi. Achievement is good on the accredited programmes that the school offers. Progress in ICT is satisfactory rather than good because the continuing accommodation difficulties have meant that only limited resources are available. In PE, achievement is not as good as it could be because too little time has been allocated to the subject.

There is no discernible difference between the achievement of different groups, such as boys and girls, although the school has limited information on this. Parents are very pleased with the progress their children make. One said, 'Westminster has really helped and pushed my son, and has shown me how much he can go forward and achieve'.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. Pupils of all ages relate caringly to each other and say how much they trust the staff, who show great kindness in the way they work with them. Good attendance, very few exclusions and good punctuality demonstrate how much they enjoy school. Pupils behave well and have a positive attitude to learning because staff, working in small groups, know the pupils very well. Pupils feel secure and act in safe ways because they receive good quality personal guidance. The development of social skills is not as fast as it could be because individual social targets are not precise or measurable.

Pupils generally make wholesome choices in what they eat, especially because of the delicious and nourishing food available at lunchtimes. However, they do not have sufficient opportunities to undertake daily physical exercise and this limits the extent to which they keep fit and lead a healthy lifestyle. Pupils and parents both say that they think that swimming should be on the timetable. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils regularly visit different places of worship and have many opportunities to join in with cultural experiences such as learning Punjabi, undertaking an art topic on a Japanese theme or taking part in Indian dances. Pupils make good contributions to the school and local communities. They feel they can articulate their aspirations and needs through the school council and have a real 'voice' in the school. They regularly raise funds for a variety of charities and are welcomed in their local community and praised for their good manners. There is very good development of the basic skills that contribute to pupils' future well-being, especially through the excellent training that the school provides to enable pupils to travel independently to and from homes and workplaces.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Pupils do well because they receive continual, individualised support in their lessons. Teachers and teaching assistants work effectively together and this enables every pupil to learn well. The good relationships, small groups, and effective management of behaviour result in a calm and industrious atmosphere in most lessons. In a small number of lessons, where difficult behaviour is not so well managed, a few pupils may behave less sensibly.

Planning of learning is based on good knowledge of each pupil's needs and pupils work on tasks that are varied, challenging and practicable. However, in a few cases, teachers do not take enough account of each pupil's literacy needs or ensure that resources are age-appropriate.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The pupils experience many enjoyable and purposeful learning opportunities. There is an extensive range of accredited programmes available. The school recognises that this range will need to be further extended to take account of the needs of the recent intake of lower attaining pupils. The curriculum is further enriched by a good range of additional activities and clubs outside the school day. The school ensures that a good range of specialist professionals work closely with school staff so that every pupil, whatever their difficulties, receives an education that is tailor-made and promotes rapid progress. The school has excellent links with other training providers and with local schools. Through these links, a significant number of pupils successfully attend classes in mainstream schools. This has a very positive impact on their confidence and self-esteem.

The school's provision for PE is not as good as it could be. This means that pupils are not enabled to take sufficient frequent regular exercise. The continuing difficulties with the accommodation have had an impact on what the school can provide. Although most of the issues have been successfully resolved, there are still temporary classrooms which have no computers or other ICT equipment, and the lack of extractor fans in rooms such as the design and technology and art areas means that vital practical aspects of these subjects are difficult to teach.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Risk assessments, checks on the backgrounds of staff and child protection procedures are secure and all pupils are kept safe and looked after well. The school has a very good reward system which effectively encourages pupils to try hard in all that they do, and helps them to succeed. Pupils who have more severe behavioural difficulties

are well supported through individual behaviour plans, so that even where pupils get upset or aggressive out of the blue, this is normally well managed, and there are very few exclusions.

Pupils' individual progress is tracked and recorded throughout the day. The school recognises that it has more to do in brushing up the quality of this system. Academic targets are sharp, and pupils know what they have to do next to improve in their learning. However, many individual social targets are too vague, so that it is not easy to judge if the pupils have been successful.

Outside agencies, parents, teachers and support staff work together very well to support the pupils' good achievement and personal development. Parents are kept fully informed, especially through telephone calls and meetings with staff. They appreciate the very close relationships that staff maintain with them and the good guidance and support they receive on how they can work together with the school for their children's benefit. One parent referred to Westminster as 'the Rolls Royce of schools'. Another parent warmly described the frequent informal meetings and weekend family residentials, which the school arranges for the families of pupils with autism. These are much appreciated and enjoyed.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The school's leaders and governors have successfully maintained and built upon its overall effectiveness since the last inspection. The headteacher and senior staff have successfully developed a culture of teamwork within the school, despite considerable difficulties, especially in staffing and accommodation. All leaders, staff and parents share the headteacher's clear vision of a school that is continually striving to improve but where each individual child is important.

The senior staff analyse data and monitor teaching regularly to see where it is best and identify what needs to be improved to raise the overall quality of teaching and pupils' progress. Although the school holds comprehensive data on the progress of individual pupils, it does not check on the achievement of the different groups of pupils, like boys or girls, or those with different types of difficulty. Although there is currently no evident underachievement, this could mean that the school might be slow to pick up any such issues in the future. Despite this, the leaders and governors have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They know what is needed to take the school forward and have clearly demonstrated a good capacity to help the school improve further. Governors are experienced, effective and supportive. They participate fully in the school improvement process, and frequently visit the school to find out for themselves how well the school is doing. The school's evaluation of its performance is in line with that of the inspection, except for two aspects. The school feels that there is outstanding personal development and well-being, and outstanding care, guidance and support. The inspectors judge these aspects to be good with one or two points for improvement.

The school maintains outstanding links with parents and with other services, such as the social services, Connexions and health, and with other primary and secondary schools, such as the local partnership formed in order to provide extended services. The school regularly seeks and takes into account the views of parents and other stakeholders, resulting in almost all parents responding positively when asked about the effectiveness of their school. The school has ensured that pupils have a good voice through the school council.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you for the warm and friendly welcome we received when we visited your school. We were impressed with how polite and confident you were and keen to tell us about your school. Thank you for all the information you gave us.

We found many good things in school.

- You work hard, learn quickly and do well in your lessons.
- You care about and get on well with each other and the staff.
- You behave well.
- Your teachers know each of you very well and make sure the work you get is at the right level so you can be successful.
- All the adults in school give you and your families the right help when you need it.
- The school prepares you very well for your future life.
- The school uses its contacts very well to make sure you get good training or even a job when you leave.

We think that there are two important things for your school to do to improve further.

- Make sure you stay very fit by giving you chances to exercise every day.
- Make sure that there are computers available for every lesson and more chances to do practical work by getting all the building work finished.

Good luck for the future.



14 September 2006

The Westminster School
Westminster Road
West Bromwich
West Midlands
B71 2JN

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Yours sincerely

Mick Megee
Lead Inspector