

School inspection report

3 to 5 March 2026

Westminster Abbey Choir School

Dean's Yard
Westminster
London
SW1P 3NY

The Independent Schools Inspectorate is appointed by the Department for Education to inspect association independent schools in England. Our inspections report on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards and other applicable regulatory requirements are met, collectively referred to in this report as 'the Standards'.

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Summary of inspection findings

1. Governors maintain effective oversight of how the school is run. They are routinely present in the school and review documentation to assure themselves that the relevant regulations are complied with. Governors support and challenge leaders appropriately. Leaders regularly monitor and review all aspects of the school to maintain rigorous safeguarding procedures, effective teaching and supportive pastoral care. Boarding is well led by trained and caring resident staff who monitor pupils' wellbeing carefully.
2. Leaders implement a broad and balanced curriculum covering the required areas of learning. The timetable accommodates pupils' choir training, Abbey services, individual instrumental tuition and regular practice. Teaching is well planned and engaging. Teachers employ skilled questioning and secure subject knowledge to deepen pupils' understanding and promote independent learning.
3. Leaders and governors share a unified strategic vision and consistently review the school's provision to guide ongoing development. Reliable risk management systems, effective collaboration with external agencies and well-maintained records underpin the school's routines and procedures. Leaders ensure that the required information is shared with parents and the local authority. The accessibility plan complies with the Equality Act 2010. Parental complaints are addressed swiftly through well-established complaints procedures. Recent enhancements to facilities, boarding and pastoral care further support pupils' wellbeing.
4. Leaders have established a suitable assessment framework to monitor pupils' progress and inform teaching. Pupils achieve well in English and mathematics. They develop secure skills in reading, writing and problem-solving. Staff use individual learning plans (ILPs) to ensure that pupils' individual needs are met. Extensive musical and other extra-curricular activities broaden pupils' interests and skills.
5. Leaders and staff have established a caring community guided by the school's culture of kindness. The personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) and relationships and sex education (RSE) curriculums are carefully planned to promote respect, equality, healthy relationships and understanding of diversity. Pupils benefit from spiritual, musical and pastoral opportunities that build confidence and self-knowledge. Behaviour is typically positive and managed well.
6. Boarding arrangements, health and safety procedures and medical provision positively promote pupils' physical and emotional wellbeing. Pupils benefit from regular physical education (PE) and boarding activities. The school site and accommodation, including boarding facilities, are maintained well. However, the amount of free time that pupils have is restricted by the demands placed upon them as choristers.
7. Leaders ensure that British values are taught across the curriculum, including in PSHE, theology, philosophy and religion (TPR) lessons and assemblies. Pupils are taught the values of respect, tolerance, democracy and the rule of law. Pupils engage in democratic processes to influence school life. Their engagement in supporting charities develops empathy, social awareness and responsible citizenship. Staff model respectful relationships and encourage collaboration through music and sport. Leadership roles and preparation for senior school life support pupils' personal development. Economic education and visiting speakers develop pupils' understanding of personal finance, careers and future responsibilities.

8. Leaders and governors promote a rigorous safeguarding culture. They maintain effective oversight of the safeguarding policy and carefully monitor safeguarding procedures. Safeguarding leaders are appropriately trained and respond promptly and appropriately to concerns. They work effectively with external agencies when required. Staff receive comprehensive training in safeguarding and understand their responsibilities. Pupils know how to communicate concerns to a trusted adult. The internet filtering and monitoring systems are effective. Effective safer recruitment procedures ensure that the required checks are completed before adults start work at the school and are accurately recorded in a suitable single central record of appointments (SCR).

The extent to which the school meets the Standards

- Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance are met.
- Standards relating to the quality of education, training and recreation are met.
- Standards relating to pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing are met.
- Standards relating to pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society are met.
- Standards relating to safeguarding are met.

Recommended next steps

Leaders should:

- ensure that pupils have as much suitably timed free time as possible to relax and support their emotional wellbeing, away from the demands of being choristers.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

9. The proprietor provides effective and consistent oversight of the school through the governing body. Governors visit regularly, review policies and audit regulatory compliance to ensure that the Standards are met consistently. Governors provide leaders with appropriate guidance, support and challenge to confirm that they possess the appropriate skills and knowledge to carry out their roles well. In these ways, they ensure effective safeguarding procedures, high-quality teaching and secure pastoral care to support the wellbeing of pupils.
10. Boarding is well led. Established procedures are in place that ensure policies, documentation and records are maintained well. Resident staff are suitably trained, knowledgeable and caring. They fulfil their roles successfully. Leaders closely monitor pupils' development and ensure that boarding nurtures their physical, emotional and social needs. Leaders and staff with responsibility for boarding are skilled and trained to carry out their responsibilities effectively.
11. Leaders and governors work together to maintain a clear strategic vision for the school. They regularly review and evaluate the school's provision to identify successes and inform the comprehensive school development plan. Leaders ensure that priorities reflect the school's aims to provide a balanced education and a supportive and nurturing boarding community for the choristers of Westminster Abbey. Regular surveys of pupils' views and leaders' analysis of academic performance inform continuous review. Resulting improvements include enhanced pastoral structures, upgraded facilities, improved boarding provision and opportunities, such as 'Friday Forum', for pupils to contribute to school development.
12. Leaders and governors have a thorough and systematic approach to risk management. They maintain clear policies and detailed risk assessments covering all on- and off-site activities, including boarding, trips, singing in the Abbey, breaktimes and sports. Staff are trained to recognise and address risks promptly. Leaders understand contextual and online risks and act swiftly when concerns are raised. Governors oversee a central risk register, and leaders ensure effective control measures are implemented to mitigate identified risks.
13. Leaders maintain constructive partnerships with external agencies, such as children's services and police. Leaders are proactive in seeking specialist advice when required, especially in relation to safeguarding. This supports their decision-making in response to concerns about pupils' welfare that arise. Leaders appropriately inform the local authority of required information relating to pupils, including when pupils join or leave the school at non-standard transition points.
14. Leaders provide the required information to parents. The school's website includes up-to-date key policies alongside information such as contact details, aims and ethos and previous inspection reports. Leaders regularly share information with parents about their child's academic progress and personal development through written reports and meetings.
15. Leaders ensure that a suitable accessibility plan is in place to increase pupils' access to information, the curriculum and the physical environment. For example, the current three-year plan includes the installation of a portable hearing loop, additional accessible toilet facilities and annual training for staff in disability awareness. The school meets its responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010.
16. The policy for managing parental complaints is clear and suitable. Leaders are accessible to parents and investigate and respond to informal and formal complaints swiftly and appropriately. Leaders

maintain detailed records of any complaints submitted, including the decisions and actions taken in response. Governors and leaders review complaints to identify learning points and to take appropriate action. Procedures for boarding complaints are also followed consistently and handled effectively. The number of formal complaints received in the previous year is made available as required.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance

17. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

18. Leaders implement a broad and balanced curriculum that includes the required areas of learning and enables pupils to focus on developing their musical abilities. The school day allows for morning and afternoon choir training as well as individual instrumental tuition on at least two instruments and regular individual practice times. All pupils learn French and older pupils are also taught Latin and Greek. The timetable is planned around the pupils' commitments as Westminster Abbey choristers.
19. Pupils develop secure knowledge, skills and understanding across all subjects. The carefully planned English curriculum encourages pupils to read confidently, write with creativity and accuracy in a range of genres and express ideas articulately. Their work includes increasingly rich vocabulary. In mathematics, pupils build firm conceptual foundations, apply methods accurately and use their skills effectively to solve real-life problems. Enthusiastic teaching in calm and purposeful classrooms, targeted support and appropriately challenging tasks enable pupils to succeed. As a result, they develop independence as learners and achieve high standards.
20. Teachers provide well-planned, engaging lessons that build securely on pupils' prior learning and are adapted to their individual needs. Teachers' high expectations, clear explanations and skilful questioning sustain pupils' curiosity and deepen their understanding. The high level of teachers' knowledge and creative use of resources enable pupils to make good progress. For example, in science, pupils plan, evaluate and refine experiments confidently. In art, they analyse the dramatic effects of light and shadow in a variety of pictures and employ these techniques in their own work. As a result, pupils develop the ability to think critically and articulate ideas clearly. Consistent support and effective classroom management ensure pupils remain motivated. They are well prepared for the next stage of their education.
21. Leaders implement a structured assessment framework that tracks pupils' attainment and progress through a range of annual standardised tests and reading and spelling checks. Leaders and teachers use this information to monitor the achievement of cohorts and individuals. In this way they ensure that the curriculum provision matches pupils' abilities and needs. Leaders' regular analysis of cohort data and detailed individual profiles supports tailored lesson planning. Assessment information is discussed by leaders and teachers to maintain a consistent, co-ordinated approach to supporting and challenging pupils appropriately.
22. Leaders establish the precise language learning requirements of pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) when they first join the school. Appropriate targets and linguistic support are provided when needed. Teachers adapt lessons, provide vocabulary guidance and ensure clear feedback so that pupils make good progress. Leaders monitor pupils' speaking, reading and writing development in English closely. As a result, pupils access the curriculum successfully.
23. Leaders identify the needs of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) proactively through assessment and monitoring. They communicate this information effectively to teachers. ILPs provide clear strategies and focus areas to support pupils and help teachers adapt lessons accordingly. Additional resources such as coloured overlays are used where needed. Leaders regularly review pupils' needs and progress to ensure that pupils who have SEND continue to access the full curriculum and make good progress from their starting points.

24. Pupils participate in a wide range of extra-curricular musical activities, including playing in ensembles as well as choral singing at a high standard. They perform regularly in public concerts and contribute music of a professional standard to the life of the Abbey. A range of other extra-curricular activities such as 'detective club', creative paper engineering, parlour games and train club enable pupils to have fun and develop other skills and interests.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to the quality of education, training and recreation

25. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 3: Pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing

26. Leaders and staff create a nurturing, inclusive environment that reflects the school rule, 'Be Kind - to others, yourself and the environment'. The PSHE curriculum teaches pupils about the importance of valuing people's characteristics, including gender and race, and promotes respect for all. Lessons explore equality, discrimination and conscious and unconscious bias. Activities during Black History Month deepen pupils' understanding of historical context and continuing racism. As a result, pupils value diversity.
27. The RSE programme is age appropriate and in line with current statutory guidance. Leaders communicate clearly with parents about RSE, including by providing information about its content and the option to withdraw pupils from particular topics. Pupils learn about consent and healthy relationships, enabling them to make informed decisions and maintain respectful friendships. Older pupils are prepared sensitively for puberty. Staff help pupils understand that they remain valued individuals when vocal changes affect their ability to sing with the choir.
28. Regular participation in Westminster Abbey services and assemblies offers pupils meaningful opportunities for prayer and reflection. Frequent performances as Abbey choristers enhance their appreciation of singing at a professional level. The TPR and PSHE curriculums teach pupils about diverse faiths and religions so that they develop insight into the spiritual perspectives of others.
29. Caring pastoral support and extensive performance opportunities foster pupils' self-knowledge and self-esteem. Daily choral training in the 'Abbey Song School' builds discipline and confidence. Pupils show assurance, acknowledge mistakes and learn from them. Public performances and school surveys enable them to articulate their views with assurance. Positive relationships with teachers and consistent praise promote positive self-image and confident communication.
30. Leaders set high behavioural expectations that are explained in assemblies during 'Anti-Bullying Week' and workshops throughout the year. Staff implement the recently updated behaviour and anti-bullying policies consistently. They recognise positive conduct through praise and rewards. Staff help pupils reflect on their actions and consider others' perspectives. Pupils typically behave well. Relationships are courteous and incidents of bullying are few. When concerns arise, leaders respond quickly, support the pupils involved and maintain accurate records of the behavioural incidents and the school's responses to them.
31. Leaders provide a structured PE programme that includes football, cricket and activities such as kayaking. Skilful teaching develops pupils' co-ordination, strength and stamina. Pupils acquire sports skills, such as passing and dribbling balls, and work productively in teams. PSHE lessons and workshops teach pupils about the benefits of exercise, nutrition, rest and relaxation for physical and mental wellbeing. Leaders recognise the pupils' need for free time to balance the demands of chorister life. However, free time for pupils to relax is limited in their busy schedule.
32. Boarding accommodation is comfortable, with recently refurbished bathrooms. Pupils can personalise dormitories and store their belongings securely. Staff offer engaging evening activities and provide sincere pastoral support. Staff are readily available for pupils to talk to and 'something to say or something to share' boxes give pupils an additional route for raising concerns. The school does not appoint educational guardians.

33. Leaders and governors maintain effective health and safety systems. Regular checks and thorough record-keeping ensure the premises are suitable, clean and well maintained. Evacuation drills, including during boarding time, ensure pupils understand emergency procedures.
34. Supervision is appropriate throughout the school day, during trips and in boarding time. Staff supervise pupils effectively when they rehearse and perform in the Abbey.
35. Admission registers are maintained as required. Leaders monitor lesson attendance closely, particularly when pupils attend individual music lessons, to ensure their wider academic progress is not affected adversely.
36. Leaders ensure effective day and night provision for pupils' medical needs. Medicines are stored securely and accurately recorded. Staff hold appropriate first aid qualifications. The school's links with external agencies, including a doctor's surgery and a counsellor, support timely healthcare.
37. Roles such as head chorister and house captains give older pupils meaningful opportunities to contribute to the community and develop a sense of responsibility. With staff guidance, they lead by example, earning the respect of younger pupils and deepening pupils' sense of belonging.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing

- 38. All the relevant Standards are met.**

Section 4: Pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society

39. Leaders review curriculum planning to ensure that British values are embedded in all subjects. They ensure that values such as individual liberty, tolerance and mutual respect are prioritised in the PSHE and TPR curriculums. Assembly themes and meetings with various delegates from across the world at Abbey services further broaden pupils' understanding of world religions and cultural traditions. This helps pupils develop empathy, an appreciation of the world and an understanding of harmony and respect in preparation for life in modern British society.
40. Pupils learn about democracy through the PSHE curriculum and awareness of protests outside Parliament. They write to public figures, such as the Lord Mayor of Westminster, to express their opinions. Pupils participate in democratic processes such as voting for house captains, PE kit colours, dormitory decor and 'movie night' films. The 'Friday Forum' enables pupils to share views on areas of school life such as menus and activities. These experiences show pupils how they can influence school life and society and underpin their understanding that everyone has the right to be heard.
41. Leaders and teachers promote pupils' social development through assemblies, form time discussions and PSHE lessons. Staff model courtesy and respect in their interactions, fostering positive relationships across the school. Singing together and playing team sports teach pupils the importance of listening carefully to others in order to collaborate effectively and live in a harmonious environment. As a result, pupils typically communicate confidently and courteously and contribute positively to the school community.
42. Leaders foster community links and provide purposeful opportunities for pupils to understand others' needs. Pupils engage in charitable activities, such as supporting charities that help address homelessness. As a result, pupils gain insight into different types of vulnerability in society and develop empathy and social awareness. Pupils learn that they can have a meaningful impact on their local and wider community.
43. PSHE lessons, assemblies, school rules and leaders' behavioural expectations develop pupils' secure understanding of the importance of the rule of law. They explore moral and ethical issues, such as the assertion that actions should reflect beliefs and the consequences of concepts of racial hierarchy in history. In these ways, pupils form clear values, demonstrate respectful conduct and gain an appreciation of right and wrong. Living and singing as part of the Abbey's choral foundation builds their understanding of public institutions. They understand their role as choristers in relation to the monarchy at services attended by the Royal Family. The PSHE curriculum teaches pupils about British institutions including Parliament, the police and the judiciary. Leaders ensure that balanced perspectives are presented to pupils whenever political matters are discussed.
44. Positions of responsibility teach pupils that their guidance can have a positive effect on their school community. School leaders discuss the responsibilities of leadership with pupils so that they understand how to undertake their roles well. They guide pupils to recognise that respect for leadership from others has to be earned and is not a given right.
45. Leaders and staff actively support pupils as they prepare for the next stage of education. They advise pupils about the likely expectations of senior school and ensure that pupils are well prepared for entrance examinations and interviews. Staff guide them through the lifestyle changes that will

follow their high-profile chorister roles, when they may not train with the same intensity or perform to a global audience. Consequently, pupils feel confident about progressing to their senior school.

46. The PSHE curriculum and visiting speakers broaden pupils' awareness of potential careers. Visits to different places of work such as recording studios and visits from the Household Cavalry make pupils aware of various career paths. Pupils are encouraged to reflect on their interests, the skills required by different professions and how these align with their long-term aspirations.
47. Economic education is woven into the PSHE and mathematics curriculums. Pupils are taught financial concepts such as savings, budgets and bank accounts and attend workshops on money matters. As a result, pupils understand why it is important to keep track of spending. In discussions, pupils explore some of the positive and negative roles that money can play in society. These experiences build pupils' understanding of economic concepts and help prepare them for future financial responsibility.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society

- 48. All the relevant Standards are met.**

Safeguarding

49. Leaders effectively promote a robust safeguarding culture. Governors meet safeguarding leaders, audit practice, review policies and scrutinise records to ensure that suitable procedures are followed. Leaders ensure that pupils are accompanied by staff who are appropriately trained in safeguarding when they are at the Abbey. Leaders understand contextual risks specific to the school and review measures regularly.
50. The designated safeguarding lead (DSL), deputy DSL and the designated safeguarding governor (DSG) are appropriately trained for their roles. They provide well-informed guidance to colleagues. Safeguarding leaders respond promptly to safeguarding concerns and provide appropriate support for pupils.
51. Leaders ensure that staff receive comprehensive and regular safeguarding training, including at induction. This includes the 'Prevent' duty to combat extremism and radicalisation and how to report low-level concerns or allegations about adults. Real-life scenarios are used effectively to enhance staff confidence in identifying, responding to and reporting concerns. As a result, staff understand safeguarding procedures well and are clear about their responsibilities.
52. The safeguarding team work constructively with external partners such as children's services and the police when required. They understand how and when to contact local safeguarding partners for advice and support and refer concerns to them when the relevant thresholds are met. Leaders manage concerns effectively, record actions clearly and store safeguarding information securely.
53. Leaders ensure that pupils can raise concerns through appropriate channels, including to an independent person and during counsellor drop-in sessions. The 'something to say or something to share' boxes and email enable pupils to communicate concerns anonymously and in writing if they prefer. Staff are consistently available, including in boarding areas and at night. Trusting relationships help pupils feel confident to approach staff. Staff know pupils well and, as a result, identify and respond to concerns quickly.
54. Pupils are taught how to stay safe online. A suitable internet filtering and monitoring system is in place so that only appropriate content is viewed. Leaders take swift and appropriate action when they receive any alerts relating to potentially inappropriate online activities.
55. Leaders are suitably trained in safer recruitment and follow robust procedures to check that adults are suitable to work with children. The required pre-appointment checks for staff and governors are completed before they commence work at the school and are accurately recorded on the single central record of appointments (SCR). Personnel files are securely stored. The DSG regularly reviews the SCR and related documentation to assure legal compliance.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

56. All the relevant Standards are met.

School details

School	Westminster Abbey Choir School
Department for Education number	213/6044
Address	Westminster Abbey Choir School Dean's Yard London SW1P 3NY
Phone number	020 7654 4918
Email address	choirschool@westminster-abbey.org
Website	www.abbeychoirschool.org
Proprietor	The Dean and Chapter of Westminster
Chair	The Very Reverend Dr David Hoyle
Headteacher	Dr Emma Margrett
Age range	8 to 13
Number of pupils	28
Number of boarding pupils	28
Date of previous inspection	7 to 9 February 2023

Information about the school

57. Westminster Abbey Choir School is an independent full boarding school for male pupils. It was founded around 1560 and is situated within the precincts of Westminster Abbey. The school is overseen by a governing body that includes several members entirely independent of the Abbey. The current headteacher took up her position in January 2024.
58. Pupils board on a full-time basis, other than in the first year when they go home at weekends. Pupils are accommodated in dormitories sited within the main school building. These are divided into areas accommodating pupils of the same age.
59. The school has identified 10 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. No pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan.
60. The school has identified English as an additional language for 10 pupils.
61. The school states that its aims are to educate and care for the pupil choristers of the Westminster Abbey Choir. Within the demands of being a specialist music school, the school seeks to provide a balanced education, a Christian environment and a safe and nurturing place in which to live.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

3 to 5 March 2026

62. A team of four inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

63. Inspection activities included:

- observation of lessons, some in conjunction with school leaders
- observation of registration periods and assemblies
- observation of a sample of extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection
- discussions with the chair and other governors
- discussions with the headteacher, school leaders, managers and other members of staff
- discussions with pupils
- visits to the learning support area and facilities for physical education
- visits to boarding houses accompanied by pupils and staff
- scrutiny of samples of pupils' work
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

64. The inspection team considered the views of pupils, members of staff and parents who responded to ISI's pre-inspection surveys.

How are association independent schools in England inspected?

- The Department for Education is the regulator for independent schools in England.
- ISI is approved by the Secretary of State for Education to inspect independent schools in England, which are members of associations in membership of the Independent Schools Council.
- ISI inspections report to the Department for Education on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards, the EYFS statutory framework requirements, the National Minimum Standards for boarding schools and any other relevant standards are met.
- For more information, please visit **www.isi.net**.

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