



Inspection of Westminster City School as a school with a Christian foundation

Local authority: Westminster
Dates of inspection: 7th – 8th March 2012
School's unique reference number: 213/4687
Head teacher: David Maloney
Inspector: Catherine Large

Context of the school and the inspection

Westminster City School is a non-diocesan secondary school. It is a smaller than average secondary school with a mixed ability intake and a sixth form which is part of a local consortium. The school's roots lie in the charitable schools which were founded in the Westminster area in the 17th century and it is still supported by the United Westminster Schools Charity. It has particularly strong links with St. Margaret's Church, Westminster Abbey. Students travel significant distances to school and most are from minority ethnic backgrounds. The school's Christian heritage determines its admissions criteria. About 75% of students come from a range of churches affiliated to Churches Together in Britain and Ireland. The remaining students come from other faith backgrounds, predominantly Islam.

The purpose of the inspection was to evaluate the effectiveness of the school as a Christian school given the diverse nature of the students' cultural and religious backgrounds and the lack of any recent inspection of this nature. Whilst based on the basic format and style of a Diocesan inspection and report, its focus is broadly Christian and not specific to any denomination.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Westminster City School as a Christian school are outstanding

The school's ethos is strongly underpinned by core Christian values and this has an outstanding impact on the overall spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of all students. Students, irrespective of faith and background, have great loyalty and respect for the school, recognising and respecting the inclusive community to which they belong.

Established strengths

- The high quality of relationships between students, the strong sense of community in the school and the respect students show for each other, for worship and for matters of faith
- The visionary leadership and management of the head teacher, senior managers and governing body in building up the Christian ethos as the context for school improvement
- The pivotal role of the chaplain and the integral part he plays in worship and generally in the spiritual life of the school
- The importance of worship in the life of the school
- The high quality of provision for religious education and results in public examinations.

Focus for development

- Further promote the school's ethos by the use of symbols and display and by providing an area in the school for personal worship or reflection
- Continue to strengthen assessment of religious education in Years 7 and 8
- Further clarify, develop and articulate the basic Christian vision for the school in conjunction with staff, students and parents.



The school, through its distinctive Christian character, is outstanding at meeting the needs of all learners

The overwhelming view of students is that the school knows and values them as individuals. They feel part of a very close community. Students from non-Christian backgrounds and from the wide range of ethnic groups, affirm the inclusivity of the school. Students often refer to the respect that is shown for religion. For example, a Muslim boy described how a group of his peers reminded others to be quiet as he was praying. It is evident in discussion and in lesson observation that the school ethos creates a good learning environment. Relationships at all levels are very good. Behaviour is generally very good and there are clear guidelines and expectations. The school has developed strategies to support students and exclusion rates have reduced dramatically. There is a culture of praise and strategies to encourage positive behaviour and effort. Attendance rates are the best in the Westminster area. Students feel they have many opportunities for their voice to be heard and this has increased, for example, through the appointment of ambassadors, form captains and peer mentors. Sixth form students are excellent role models and assume high degrees of responsibility within school and in the local community in forms of outreach and support. Pastoral care is effective and the role of worship and charity monitors within forms reinforces the ethos of the school. A wide range of charities is supported. For example, the school is committed to the Zabaleen Christian School which is working with the garbage collectors of Cairo. There is an excellent range of clubs, extra-curricular activities and visits. The school is increasing its links with the local community and business and is highly aspirational for its students. For example, the Mosaic mentoring scheme provides a growing number of pupils in Years 9-11 with significant experiences and opportunities to engage with business leaders and other professionals. The personal spiritual development of students is further enhanced through the Christian Union and, for Muslim students, the provision of facilities for daily and Friday prayers. The school recognises the need to support students of other faiths and is careful to ensure that their integrity is not compromised in the context of the school's Christian foundation. For example, a visit to the religious community in Taize, France is offered to all Year 10-13 students. Whilst the new building has greatly enhanced facilities, the school recognises that there is insufficient physical acknowledgement of the Christian as well as the broadly spiritual dimension of its vision, for example, through art work, symbols and displays on the plasma screen. The lack of a dedicated space in the building for individuals or small groups to pray or reflect is also an area that is currently lacking.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Worship is valued by the students and is integral to the life of the school. The programme for daily collective worship is very well balanced. Students benefit from a variety of worship experiences, including different groupings ranging from form groups to the whole school, as well as at least four opportunities in the year to experience worship in St. Margaret's Church and two in Westminster Chapel. Leadership also varies and includes local clergy as well as the chaplain and senior leaders in school. There are very significant services at festival times, such as the carol service to which well over 90% of staff and students contribute and the Ash Wednesday service where many students wished to be ashed. The programme is planned by the chaplain and is broadly based around key themes. These themes are generally followed through in form worship but there is flexibility for students to plan presentations and pray on aspects of their choosing. This works well and the form worship prefects play an important part in supporting and leading their tutor group. For example, there is regular use of prayer, both spontaneous and read from the students' own written prayers in form books. Prayer is offered at the beginning and end of the day and affirms the values of the school. Whether in small or large groups, students are reverent and respectful. They bow their heads and reflect. As one Muslim student observed, 'When we are together and we are all quiet, it feels like we are all brothers'. Increasingly over recent years, students are participating in leadership roles and they are keen for this to be increased. The quality of worship is enhanced by the use of power point presentations and film, by students reading and, as observed, two young students interviewing one of their peers about his playing of the violin and the sacrifice of time he made to practise. Although there is no formal monitoring of worship, students confirm that it is central to the life of the school. Photographic evidence also reflects the positive and thoughtful response of students to worship. The worship prefects meet regularly with the chaplain and the school recognises that there is potential to increasing their involvement and that of staff in contributing to the leading and evaluating of worship.



The effectiveness of religious education is good

Religious education is well supported by the school in its specialist staffing, curriculum provision and other resources. All students undertake a GCSE course which begins in Year 9. They are positive about the subject and feel it makes a good contribution to their understanding of faiths other than their own. It is one of the best achieving subjects in the school with results at GCSE being just above national averages. Advanced Level results are in line with national averages. The curriculum is appropriate for the school and the backgrounds of students, ensuring that other faiths as well as Christianity are studied in Years 7 and 8 and Christianity and Islam form the focus in the examination groups. Provision for non-examination religious education in the sixth form is limited to a one day conference. Given the ethos of the school and the maturity and religious interests of the students, this is an area the school should address. In Years 7 and 8, students of all abilities make good progress and many can identify what they need to do to improve. Assessment of progress in these years is becoming more secure and consistent with the introduction of key tasks and level descriptors that inform teachers and students about attainment and progress. Overall, the quality of teaching is good with some outstanding features. Teachers' subject knowledge is excellent. It is particularly noticeable as students are prepared for examinations where a thorough grasp of examination requirements enables teachers to support them in achieving their potential. In Years 7 and 8, lessons are planned and paced well and teachers use a very good range of teaching and learning styles to engage and motivate students. For example, group and peer learning is encouraged though the use of 'silent debate' where students record personal evaluations on topics and then listen to and evaluate the contributions of others. The department nurtures the students in their respect for the faiths and beliefs of others and also in their confidence and self-expression. Work is well adapted to the different learning needs of students across the year groups. Feedback to students is good although it is not always consistent and students, especially in the lower ability examination groups, do not complete work or follow up on teachers' comments. In the best lessons, teachers' questioning skills are used effectively so that students develop their understanding and analytical skills. Relationships are excellent. Teachers generally use resources, especially technology, very well although the department recognises that there are areas that could be strengthened. These include the use of artefacts, first-hand experience through visits and visitors and by increasing the potential leadership skills of students in lessons. The department is well organised and managed and, through regular subject review senior leaders and the head of department, have correctly identified the need for more rigorous monitoring across the key stages.

The effectiveness of the leadership and management of the school as a Christian school is outstanding

Commitment to the Christian foundation of the school is very strong and it stems, not only from its historic traditions, but from the current convictions and vision of the head teacher supported by the senior managers, governing body and staff. Over recent years this has become even more fully embedded in the policies and practices of the school. Whilst clear and explicit about the Christian vision, the school is fully committed to creating an ethos of inclusive spirituality in which all students, irrespective of ethnicity and faith, can flourish. Overwhelmingly, the students and parents endorse and appreciate the impact this achieves in community spirit and individual growth. The head teacher is widely respected for his leadership, his relationships with the students and parents and for the way the school has improved over recent years. The chaplain also makes an outstanding contribution to the life of the school. His role is crucial to the school's ethos as he supports the staff and students in its daily life and worship. He is respected by non-Christian students as a spiritual leader and is also seen, especially by senior students, as one who helps them understand the relevance of faith in the wider world. Links with St Margaret's Church and with other local clergy are strong. Links with other local faith communities are at early stages. There are growing links with local schools, especially by members of the sixth form and with charitable causes at the Abbey Centre and a local centre for refugees. Students feel they are able to communicate well with the school's leadership by mechanisms such as the peer mentoring and subject ambassadors. The school benefits greatly from the active support of the Old Westminster Citizens' Association. Communication with parents and with others associated with the school is very good in the form of the high quality newsletter. Parents' attendance at consultation evenings is excellent. The school is seeking ways in which parental contact can be increased, recognising the difficulties presented by the distances some students travel. A new online system is evidence of the school's commitment to engaging more with parents. The expressions of the school's Christian identity are explicit on the school's website and admissions criteria but are not communicated clearly through symbol and display in the building. The school has made very significant progress in recent years in improving the Christian ethos and there is confidence among staff and students. It recognises that this ethos could now be further embedded and extended through wide consultation and review.