

The Westside School

Independent School

Inspection report

DfES Registration Number	213/6394
Unique Reference Number	135082
Inspection number	302973
Inspection dates	20 March 2007
Reporting inspector	Stephen Grounds HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002 (as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005).

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, in order to advise the Secretary of State for Education and Skills about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Information about the school

The Westside School opened in October 2006 on the edge of the London Borough of Westminster. The school is located in a modern building owned by the Avenues Youth Project, a local authority supported scheme providing courses and facilities for young people at various times of the day.

The headteacher has developed two other successful schools along similar lines in other London boroughs. The school's founding trustee brings expertise from business and elsewhere in helping students engage with the wider community. The current cohort of students is drawn from the London boroughs of Kensington and Chelsea, Hammersmith and Fulham and Wandsworth. The students are mainly young people aged 15 to 16 years who for various reasons have disengaged from mainstream education or are at risk of exclusion. Currently four of the five on roll have been placed by local authorities. No students have a statement of special educational need. Most teaching is carried out by the headteacher, although he is supported by part-time specialist teachers for mathematics, physical education and art. The school aims to work closely in partnership with parents and carers and to instruct, nurture and re-engage students through highly effective lessons which promote creativity, security and calmness.

Evaluation of the school

The Westside School is a good school. It provides a good quality of education and is successful in meeting its aims. All but one of the regulations are met. It provides good teaching and a good standard of care enabling students who have had unsuccessful or unhappy school experiences to re-engage in the learning process. It develops very positive attitudes in its students, who make good progress. The curriculum enables the development of basic skills, the promotion of higher order levels of study appropriate to students in an upper secondary school and the positive development of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness. Very high quality social interactions are evident around the school.

Quality of education

The curriculum is good. All students attend full-time for 25 hours each week and are provided with a wide range of learning opportunities that are highly appropriate to their ages and interests. The curriculum provides opportunities for all students to learn and achieve and promotes all elements of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development so as to prepare them for leaving school.

The curriculum is mainly based on externally accredited examinations. Students follow General Certificate of Secondary Education courses in English, mathematics, information and communication technology, psychology, physical education, history and art and design and they also study citizenship and personal, social and health education (PSHE). Courses leading to Entry Level certificates accredited by the Oxford and Cambridge board are available. These courses and subjects provide students with very many activities that focus on developing new literacy and numeracy skills, as well as opportunities to practise previously acquired or half-learned ones. Although science is not taught as a discrete subject, scientific ideas are considered in psychology and physical education. Work in art and design encourages students' creative skills and aesthetic awareness. Students have access to a good variety of resources including computers and all regularly visit the nearby local library.

A strength of the academic curriculum is the strong contribution that some subjects make to students' personal development. In this way students are prepared well for leaving school. For instance, citizenship gives students a very good understanding of many features of their community and of much wider social issues as identity, unemployment, the law, and global economic issues. The history course has led to much student engagement in the issue of the instability of the German state during the Weimar republic and the resulting lessons for politics today. The PSHE programme is equally effective in promoting personal development as students examine the characteristics of healthy lifestyles and relationships and benefit from sessions on sex and drugs education. An important feature is the external enrichment that is built into the curriculum together with in-house events and outside trips. The outside trips have included locations such as the London Aquarium and the Globe Theatre. The Old Bailey was visited in the course of a high profile trial. This raised issues relating to journalists and confidentiality. In-house events have included videos and DVDs of imaginatively chosen plays and stories.

At the time of the inspection the school was at the early stages of developing aspects of work-related learning. These are to roll out in the summer term with some placements already arranged. Students have met a Connexions career adviser.

The quality of teaching and assessment is good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and plan their lessons very well to take into account the academic and personal needs of all learners. The school is very successful in reintroducing students to education through regular attendance and the establishment of codes of behaviour. It then builds on these in lessons through the quality of teaching. Students learn very well and make good progress. Lessons are long, but students remain fully engaged, are keen to participate and show very positive attitudes towards their learning. They take care with the presentation of their work and generally complete what is expected of them. Students have produced a great deal of work in a short time. This is very impressive for students who, previously, have not attended school regularly and have been disillusioned with the experience of secondary school.

Students' literacy and numeracy skills are assessed upon entry to the school and most students have also been assessed by an educational psychologist to establish their individual learning problems. This information is used most effectively. Individual education plans are produced and frequently updated. Teachers acknowledge students' individual targets in their lesson planning and in the activities they provide. Student management is exemplary and so time is used very efficiently; lessons are very productive.

The most striking features of lessons are the strength of relationships and the quality of interactions that take place. Mutual respect between staff and students enable the former to have high expectations and the latter to have the confidence to become involved. Consequently, staff are able to set challenging work and take risks in their teaching. They maintain high standards of behaviour while students readily attempt the tasks they are given. This is particularly evident during discussions and associated activities. Students have the confidence to express their views. When they discussed personal space and carried out psychological experiments they were remarkably honest and sensitive toward each other.

For all but two students the time since enrolment is so short that assessment information is limited. However, work is marked routinely and teachers produce informative feedback sheets to students after units of work have been completed. These are very useful in enabling students to know how they can improve. They include teachers' comments about the work completed and action points for improvement, including timescales. Students also have the opportunity to record their comments about their work and to note areas for development. However, the formal process of monitoring, recording and reporting on students' progress as distinct from the achievement of individual pieces of work needs further development.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The school's provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. A sense of community is evident throughout the school. Individual religious views are respected. Behaviour in school is good, as is attendance. Students strongly affirm that they enjoy coming to school and feel that they are making much better progress than in their previous settings. Class discussions and visits frequently consider complex issues, such as that promoted by the Holocaust exhibition at the Imperial War Museum. Such experiences are most effective in getting students to use their imagination and to express opinions about situations that are remote from their own experiences.

Social and moral development is encouraged very strongly both formally and informally. Topics in the citizenship and PSHE courses contribute formally, while the whole school ethos is focused on getting pupils to make informed choices and to take responsibility for the outcomes of those decisions. This is evident in students' decisions relating to completing work, abiding by the school rules and collaborating with classmates (for example in the regular cleaning and maintenance of the classroom and its displays). More could be done to develop students' leadership skills. Nevertheless, as a consequence of the school's current provision, students are developing a very good understanding of living and working harmoniously with others, resolving conflict and taking responsibility for independent work. These experiences are extremely good preparation for further education, employment and being part of the community in which they live.

Students' cultural awareness is promoted in many ways. Literature, films and plays introduce them to the works of British and international authors and artists. This learning is reinforced very well by the visits to places of cultural interest. As a result, students are developing a good understanding of their own and other cultures.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The school has made good provision for the welfare, health and safety of the students. It is a safe place in which to work and learn. It encourages students to be aware of their own safety and well-being and has devised and implemented a comprehensive range of policies, which include those on child protection, anti-bullying, health and safety on visits outside school and behaviour. It is vigilant about safety in the school and has for the time being ceased using a local park because of its own judgement of risk. Risk assessment is a strong feature of the school management. Fire safety is covered by the arrangements of the Avenues Youth project. No accidents have

occurred but if they were to occur a first aider is on the premises at all times. The school encourages the students to eat healthily, bringing their own food at lunchtime and to take regular exercise. Students know to whom to turn if they have any concerns or problems and they feel very secure in school. The school fulfils its duties with regard to the Disability Discrimination Act 2002.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school takes great care to ensure that all staff employed by the school and volunteers are suitable for the work that is expected of them. All staff have a Criminal Records Bureau check at an appropriate level. However, the school has not always received two written references for applicants and needs to ensure that requests for references explicitly ask whether there is any reason why applicants should not work with children.

School's premises and accommodation

The teaching is conducted in a suitably sized classroom within the larger youth centre premises. The facilities used by students, including toilet facilities, are largely self-contained. The classroom is of a suitable size and, as part of a new building, is well appointed. Students also have access to a first floor gymnasium, and use a first floor circulation area at break and lunch times. At other times the school uses the local library and local sports facilities.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school provides parents with all the necessary information. They are kept well informed about their children's progress by regular contact with the school. There is a policy of allowing a parent to meet the headteacher at any time and without an appointment. Parents are also advised that they may visit any of the classes to view the quality of the teaching and learning at first hand. No reports have yet been issued but what the school plans for summer 2007 is appropriate.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school has a set of procedures which meet the regulations.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended January 2005, with the exception of that noted below.

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of suitability of proprietor and staff (standard 4) and must:

- prior to the confirmation of the appointment of all staff ensure that two written references are received and that requests for these explicitly ask whether there is any reason why the applicant should not work with children (paragraph 4(c)).

What the school could do to improve further

While not required by the regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development:

- develop its systems to monitor, record and report on students' longer term progress
- increase the opportunities for students to develop leadership skills.

School details

Name of school	The Westside School		
DfES number	213/6394		
Unique reference number	135082		
Type of school	Upper Secondary		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	October 2006		
Age range of pupils	14-16 years		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 4	Girls: 1	Total: 5
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Annual fees (day pupils)	£ 8,700		
Address of school	3-7 Third Avenue London W10 4RS		
Telephone number	07866 455119		
Email address	paul@paulmoody.co.uk		
Headteacher	Mr Paul Moody		
Proprietors	The Westside Independent School Ltd		
Reporting inspector	Stephen Grounds HMI		
Dates of inspection	20 March 2007		