

# The American School in London

1 Waverley Place, London NW8 0NP

## Inspection dates

20–22 March 2018

Overall effectiveness	Outstanding
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Outstanding
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Outstanding
Early years provision	Outstanding
Sixth form provision	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is an outstanding school

- The new headteacher, school leaders and trustees have continued to sustain and build on the school's outstanding educational provision.
- Leaders have created an environment where they make all members of staff and pupils feel valued. Leaders encourage staff and pupils to reflect on their work, share their ideas and strive for continuous improvement.
- Teachers plan exciting and challenging activities that motivate pupils to learn extremely well. They use their knowledge of pupils' interests and abilities to encourage them to research, experiment and attempt more difficult tasks. In addition, leaders and teachers use ongoing assessment information to arrange additional support for those pupils who fall behind.
- Across the year groups and subjects, pupils make substantial progress.
- Pupils have exceptionally positive attitudes to learning. They work hard and with determination to succeed. In lessons and around the school, pupils behave maturely.
- Leaders provide pupils with extensive pastoral care and implement rigorous safeguarding procedures. As a result, they make sure that pupils feel safe and that their well-being is assured.
- The extensive and varied programme of enrichment activities makes an outstanding contribution to pupils' personal development.
- Provision in the sixth form is exemplary. Highly effective teaching, pastoral support and careers guidance ensure that students make strong progress. They leave the school extremely well prepared for the next stage of their education and future lives as responsible citizens.
- The early years provision ensures that children's start to school life is excellent. The highly stimulating indoor provision is not fully reflected outdoors.
- Leaders have ensured that the school is compliant with all the independent school standards.

### Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

## **Full report**

### **What does the school need to do to improve further?**

- Improve the quality of the outdoor provision for the early years so that it can make an even greater contribution to children's learning and development.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

### Outstanding

- Leaders, including trustees, communicate a clear vision for developing excellence in pupils' academic achievements. They strive to ensure that pupils build their resilience as learners and develop a strong commitment to contributing positively to the wider community. They continually seek improvement and adapt their provision to meet the ongoing changes in society, such as changes to technology and work practices. There is no sense of complacency. Leaders consult regularly with members of staff, pupils, parents and carers to review and refine their practice. As a result, pupils and members of staff feel valued, work hard and thrive. As one member of staff put it, 'The ethos of constant reflection on teaching, learning and school processes makes for positive growth in all areas.'
- Leaders regularly check on the quality of teaching and hold teachers to account for their pupils' outcomes. Leaders provide teachers with frequent opportunities to attend training and to learn from educational research. Every member of staff is given an annual allowance to spend in pursuit of their own professional development. As a result, teaching is consistently of a high standard and staff morale is high.
- Leaders design the curriculum to give pupils an extremely broad education. As they progress to the higher years, pupils can choose from a range of subjects. If older pupils express a wish to learn a subject not usually offered on the curriculum, leaders try to find suitable teachers to facilitate the pupils' interests. Pupils are positively encouraged to develop their interests and undertake research projects. For instance, the Parent Community Association awards small grants for pupil-initiated research projects. Recently, this included sponsoring a robotics development programme that also involved pupils from other schools in the neighbourhood. Pupils also participated in an international robotics competition in China, where they were able to share ideas with peers from around the world and learn about emerging technologies.
- Leaders offer pupils an extensive range of enrichment activities. Inspectors observed a hive of activity after the school day ended. For instance, groups of pupils were engrossed in activities such as swimming, reading, sewing, ceramics and much more. All pupils sing and play instruments, learn art and take part in musical and theatrical performances. Pupils visit museums, art galleries, places of worship and many other places of culture that London has to offer. Pupils benefit from high-profile visitors, such as international film directors, authors and entrepreneurs. Frequent workshops and formal lessons help pupils understand and celebrate diversity, including people who have the protected characteristics, as well as democracy, law and social justice. All of these opportunities make an excellent contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and prepare them extremely well for their future lives in this country and abroad.
- Although the school is registered to provide education for 1,350 pupils, there are currently 1,370 pupils on roll. This means that the school is operating outside its registration agreement.

## Governance

- The trustees bring extensive professional experience, such as from the worlds of finance, law and media, to their roles. They play a major role in ensuring that the school provides an outstanding education and that it seeks continual improvement.
- Since the previous inspection, trustees have secured funding to improve the school's resources. They have built a new teaching facility for arts and a fitness centre that includes a swimming pool and dance studio, and redesigned the sports club.
- Trustees secured a highly successful appointment in the new headteacher. Trustees set the headteacher ambitious goals for improvement and she models this process for other leaders and members of staff.
- Trustees have established six committees to oversee different aspects of the school's work. Each committee meets monthly with a designated member of the school's senior leadership team in attendance. Trustees regularly audit their own effectiveness and commission external financial audits to check on the school's work. Overseas consultants undertake audits of areas of the curriculum and provide professional development to trustees. During the annual trustee day, all trustees visit the school to talk to pupils and staff and observe lessons and breaktimes. Trustees invite pupils to make presentations at each full trustees meeting. Through these processes and the headteacher's reports, trustees are well informed about the school's work and this helps them to hold leaders to account.
- Trustees and school leaders make sure that the school meets the independent school standards and other requirements.

## Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- There is a very strong culture of vigilance to make sure that pupils are safe. The school employs its own security team to ensure that only known people can enter the building.
- The school has a large safeguarding and welfare team made up of 13 members of staff. The team has four trained safeguarding leaders on the staff, as well as nurses, educational psychologists and counsellors. This team takes care of pupils' safety, physical health and emotional and welfare needs.
- Leaders provide staff with regularly updated safeguarding training and all staff undertake an annual online safeguarding training course. Leaders commission external consultants to check on their safeguarding procedures. Leaders, including a trustee, attend the annual National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children conference to help them keep up to date with the latest national safeguarding issues.
- The senior safeguarding leader has established strong links with external agencies to support her and pupils in dealing with safeguarding and welfare concerns.
- The curriculum makes a very strong contribution to helping pupils understand how to keep safe in various situations. The police speak to pupils and give them advice on how to stay safe in London. All pupils are taught about digital citizenship, which includes work on internet safety. On the last day of the inspection, pupils and parents were invited to an

address by a psychotherapist and body image specialist on 'social media and body image for boys and girls'.

- The school publishes its safeguarding policy on its website. The policy has due regard to current government requirements.

## **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

## **Outstanding**

- The consistently high quality of teaching ensures that pupils make very strong progress in their learning.
- Across the school, teachers plan learning in a way that increasingly helps pupils to gain new knowledge, deepen their understanding and develop and apply a range of skills across subjects.
- Teachers set tasks that inspire pupils and make them curious. Teachers pose interesting and challenging questions that provoke pupils' thinking. As a result, pupils are keen to explore many topics and discover more. They readily work with others to share ideas and apply their skills to resolve difficult problems together.
- Teachers have very sound subject knowledge. They check on pupils' progress and adapt their teaching to help those falling behind and to stretch the most able. They build a strong rapport with pupils and find ways of nurturing pupils' interests. As a result, pupils enjoy learning and work diligently.
- Teachers actively encourage pupils to express their opinions. They routinely pose challenging, and sometimes controversial, questions to facilitate discussion. In one such debate seen during the inspection, pupils stated their arguments in support of or against the statement 'the internet gives people all around the world a shared experience and helps us to positively connect to other human beings'. These opportunities make a strong contribution to pupils' moral development and debating skills.
- Teachers encourage pupils to evaluate their own work and that of their peers. Teachers often discuss pupils' work with them and give them feedback in line with the school's policy. As a result, pupils know what they are doing well and what they need to do to improve their work. This helps pupils to improve their work and raise their standards.

## **Personal development, behaviour and welfare**

## **Outstanding**

### **Personal development and welfare**

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Adults encourage pupils to express their views, to engage in many enrichment activities and to explore things about which they feel passionate. As a result, pupils become highly articulate, self-confident and thoughtful learners.
- As part of the formal curriculum, pupils learn how to stay healthy, both physically and mentally. Physical education is high on the agenda and extremely well resourced. Pupils participate in a wide range of sports and have opportunities to compete in local and international leagues.

- The safeguarding team and personal advisers give pupils access to professional expertise to support their mental and emotional well-being and their physical health.
- Pupils make a strong contribution to the school, local and international communities. Earlier this year, 400 pupil and parent volunteers took part in the annual 'community service day' in 14 venues, including hospices, soup kitchens and city farms. Pupil representatives travelled to Paris to join pupils from around the world to take part in a youth United Nations. They joined other participants in assuming roles of national ambassadors or representatives to debate and solve global issues. As part of the school's work on developing pupils' cultural competency, a group of pupils attended a 'people of colour' conference in America.
- The school has a dedicated facility with full-time members of staff to ensure that pupils receive personalised impartial careers guidance. They work very closely with American and British tertiary education providers and every year the school holds its own university fair. The school supports pupils extremely well in making decisions about the next stage of their careers and in pursuing their goals for the future.

## Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- Pupils have excellent attitudes to learning. They are highly ambitious and make the most of all the learning opportunities on offer. They work extremely well in collaborating with each other and their teachers. They are ambitious and studious. Throughout the school day and after hours, pupils work hard with their peers or study independently in the school's libraries.
- Pupils behave with maturity when they move around the school and during breaks and social times. Typical of pupils' attitudes was one comment made to an inspector: 'We feel that we have a moral duty to welcome new pupils to the school because we have all been there.'
- Pupils take responsibility in making sure that others behave well. The 'student faculty disciplinary board', for instance, takes charge of hearing and recommending consequences for disciplinary matters.

## Outcomes for pupils

## Outstanding

- The school's tracking information, together with inspection evidence, confirms that pupils currently in the school are making outstanding progress across subjects. This has also been the case historically.
- All groups of pupils are making substantial progress. Leaders and teachers quickly identify pupils who are not on track to meet their ambitious targets. Leaders deploy support specialists to help those pupils catch up. Leaders create individual learning plans for pupils in need of additional help. These strategies ensure that pupils get back on track to meet their targets.
- Most-able pupils are given more difficult work to deepen their thinking. As they progress into the upper years, they study additional subjects of their choice and undertake

research projects. This means that they make sustained progress in a breadth of subjects and reach the high standards of which they are capable.

### Early years provision

### Outstanding

- Leadership of the early years is particularly effective. Leaders have high expectations for teachers and adults. Each term, leaders set incrementally more difficult targets for children’s achievement. They have created effective systems to check on every child’s progress. They provide extra help for any children who fall behind and even more challenging work for the most able. Adults carefully plan activities that inspire children to learn extremely well and develop strong social skills. Children are very well prepared academically and socially for the next stages of their education.
- Teachers and other adults plan stimulating activities that help children make substantial and sustained progress across all areas of learning. For instance, inspectors observed children involved in a bridge-building project. Teachers introduced the topic by discussing what bridges are and showing children pictures of world-famous bridges. Children made their own bridges, choosing a range of materials. They gained considerable scientific and general knowledge, and applied their creative and artistic skills very well. Children benefit from specialist teachers, such as for physical education and art.
- Children feel very safe and adults take great care of their welfare. Children’s behaviour is excellent. They are inquisitive, and adults encourage them to try things out for themselves. Children discuss with teachers what information they would like to find out and agree how they will go about their learning. Teachers consistently encourage children to share their ideas and help them develop a wide-ranging vocabulary. Children express themselves articulately and confidently. Children are fully engaged and concentrate on their learning, for example when applying their mathematical skills to resolve difficult problems. They share and work collaboratively together, listening attentively to teachers and each other. These attitudes make an excellent contribution to children’s learning and social development.
- The indoor classrooms and other specialist teaching rooms are very well resourced. They provide an inviting and exciting learning environment for children. There are abundant high-quality resources to support all areas of learning, including literacy and mathematics. Children’s work is displayed and celebrated, as are the rules of behaviour agreed by the teacher and the children. Based on the class’s reading book, children learned about different types of fabric. Their work with various fabrics and written reflections are prominently displayed, as is their creative artwork, which was based on recycled products. The outdoor provision, however, is not of the same high standard. Outdoor resources, especially in terms of developing children’s mathematical and literacy skills, are not of the same very high standard found indoors.
- Leaders have ensured that the setting meets the independent school standards and the statutory requirements for the early years foundation stage.

### Sixth form provision

### Outstanding

- The school has sustained and built on its previous outstanding post-16 education provision. The school delivers an American-accredited curriculum. Excellent leadership

ensures that students can choose from an extensive range of academic and vocational subjects. These include multiple English and mathematical options. Leaders secure highly effective teaching and pastoral care that ensure that students make outstanding academic progress.

- Inspection evidence confirms that students are making strong progress across the subjects and that they are well on track to succeed in their examinations. The most able students take American Advanced Placement (AP) courses that American universities consider equivalent to their first-year university courses. The school offers 23 such courses. Over the last three years, large and increasing numbers of students have taken the AP courses and success rates continue to increase. In 2017, as is typical over time, about 85% of students proceeded to top American universities. Most of the other students enrolled in British universities, including Oxbridge and the Russell Group. A few students went to universities abroad.
- Students work diligently because they are determined to succeed and have high aspirations for the future. The school's advisers give students excellent impartial careers advice. Visits from the deans of American universities and representatives from British universities supplement this guidance. Furthermore, there are opportunities for students to develop their employability and personal skills. For the last three summers of their schooling, students can choose from 150 work placements that the school has secured. Students spend anything from two to seven weeks on these work placements. Some students undertake work placements abroad.
- Students make a very strong contribution to the community. The student social justice committee organises an annual event, arranging discussions on topics such as social justice, privilege and diversity. This year's theme was 'identifiers', encouraging participants to consider and discuss gender, age, race, socioeconomic status, ability, sexual orientation, religion and nationality. This and many other opportunities make a very strong contribution to preparing students extremely well for their future lives.

## School details

Unique reference number	101168
DfE registration number	213/6215
Inspection number	10026276

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Independent day school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	4 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,370
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	231
Proprietor	American School In London Educational Trust
Chair	David Novak
Headteacher	Robin Appleby
Annual fees (day pupils)	£25,500–£29,950
Telephone number	020 7449 1200
Website	<a href="http://www.asl.org">www.asl.org</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:head_of_school@asl.org">head_of_school@asl.org</a>
Date of previous inspection	19–21 February 2013

## Information about this school

- The American School in London's stated aim is to 'develop the intellect and character of each student by providing an outstanding American education with a global perspective'.
- The school, situated in St John's Wood, London, was founded in 1951. It is an important educational and cultural centre for American families in London. It is an independent day school for boys and girls. There are 1,370 students aged between four and 18 years.

- This was the school's third standard inspection. The last inspection was in February 2013. It was judged to be providing an outstanding education in both of its previous standard inspections.
- Since the previous inspection, there have been changes to the senior leadership team and the trustees have appointed a new chair. The current headteacher took up her post in July 2017.
- The school does not use alternative education provision.
- There are no pupils currently on roll with an education, health and care plan.
- The school follows an American curriculum and is structured into three phases: lower, middle and high schools.
- The school is accredited by the American Middle States Association of Colleges and the Council of International Schools. The school is a member of the National Association of Independent Schools, the Council of International Schools and the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education.
- The school is operating outside of its registration agreement, as it is educating 20 pupils above the number for which it is registered.

## Information about this inspection

- The inspection was carried out with one day's notice.
- Inspectors observed learning in 37 parts of lessons. Most of these were joint observations with senior leaders.
- Inspectors scrutinised samples of pupils' work. They checked the school's information about pupils' progress.
- Inspectors spoke with the headteacher, other leaders, teachers and other members of staff. They also met with the chair of trustees and four other trustees. Inspectors had formal discussions with three groups of pupils and various informal discussions with pupils during social times and lessons.
- Inspectors took account of the 127 responses to Ofsted's questionnaire for parents and the comments of parents who spoke with inspectors at the end of the school day. Inspectors considered the 89 responses to the staff questionnaire.
- Inspectors checked documentation, policies and all aspects of the school's work for compliance with the independent school standards.

## Inspection team

David Radomsky, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
David Davies	Ofsted Inspector
Neil Harvey	Ofsted Inspector
Gerard Strong	Ofsted Inspector
Sarah Parker	Her Majesty's Inspector

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