

The American School in London

Independent school inspection report

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Reporting inspector Mark Lindfield HMI

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under section 162A¹ of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005², the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Information about the school

The American School in London's stated mission is to 'develop the intellect and character of each student by providing an outstanding American education with a global perspective'. The school was founded in 1951. It is a co-educational day school for 1,314 pupils aged between four and 18 years. The school acts as an important cultural and educational centre for American families in London. The school has a strong international composition, attracting students from over 47 different countries. A small proportion of pupils have statements of special educational needs. The school follows an American structure and is organised into three departments: the lower, middle and high schools. The school was last inspected in September 2006.

The school has two year groups within the Kindergarten classes. The youngest year group, Kindergarten 1, comprises 36 children in two classes. These children are referred to throughout this report as Early Years Foundation Stage children.

Evaluation of the school

The school successfully meets its aims in providing an outstanding education leading to outstanding outcomes. The Early Years Foundation Stage is outstanding. The school's excellent leadership effectively promotes an inspiring and purposeful learning environment. Every student is valued and able to make exceptional progress both personally and academically. The school has good safeguarding arrangements in place. As at the time of the last inspection, the school continues to provide an excellent education. It has made improvements in producing a complaints procedure and a written anti-bullying policy. The school now meets all but one of the regulations.

Quality of education

The curriculum is outstanding. It is extensive in terms of depth and balance and students are provided with a wide variety of high quality learning experiences. It is meticulously mapped and monitored across the school to ensure students'

¹ www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2002/ukpga_20020032_en_14#pt10-ch1-pb4-l1g162

² www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2005/ukpga_20050018_en_15#sch8

experiences are built on from year to year. As a result, the curriculum meets the differing needs of the school's students, including those children in the Early Years Foundation Stage, extremely well. Information and communication technology (ICT) is used extensively across all subjects as a teaching resource and as an aid to learning. Older students have access to school intranet sites with clear links to a daily diary, individual lesson plans, resources and homework. These pages are easily accessed by teachers and parents. The curriculum has many strengths; an excellent number of modern foreign languages are offered, including Mandarin, as well as Latin. The quality of provision for expressive and creative arts is extremely high, as is the provision for sport and physical education. The range of extra-curricular activities and the number of visits to museums, art galleries and other areas are outstanding, enabling students to gain an extensive knowledge and understanding of British institutions and the countryside. Large numbers of students take part in these activities and also visit Europe and the United States of America.

Personal, social and health education is provided through an excellent programme and students show a good appreciation and understanding of how to develop healthy lifestyles. In addition, older students are involved in community service which includes work experience where appropriate. The systems for maintaining good behaviour are effective because students respond extremely well; very positive relationships at all levels make a strong contribution to students' good personal development and mature attitudes. The advice for students proceeding to higher education is excellent and ensures that students make the best choices for universities in the United States of America, Canada, and the United Kingdom and other European countries. The school prepares them well so that the vast majority of students go on to take up places at these institutions.

Teaching and assessment are outstanding. From the earliest age students learn successfully, and make good and sometimes exceptional progress because they are consistently well taught. Teachers know their students well. In most lessons teachers use a wide range of strategies to elicit students' knowledge, gains and understanding and to keep check on their progress. Well-organised plenary sessions consolidate the key learning outcomes. Assessment is regular and ongoing and very much a part of the well-sequenced lessons. Across the school and most notably within the High School, the use of precise learning objectives in planning and delivery helps the students to know what is expected of them and increases their rates of progress.

Classrooms across the school are lively, stimulating places and students work with enthusiasm because they are interested in their studies. They build very good self-esteem from teachers' strong emphasis on positive praise. Well-resourced and exciting lessons engage students' sustained application; the very best lessons are a buzz of activity with teachers making very clear to students what constitutes high standards of work. These high expectations inspire students to perform to their best.

Students with special educational needs and/or difficulties benefit from additional input that is tailor-made to their needs. Parents are vociferous in their praise for the

support these children receive from the school and staff. Intervention programmes are carefully monitored for their effectiveness and as they progress through the school students are successfully encouraged to become increasingly independent and self-reliant. Students learning to speak English as an additional language are well catered for through expertly coordinated provision.

The framework in place to assess students' work is well conceived and is well utilised to plan teaching so that students can make the best rates of progress. Opportunities for peer- and self-assessment are positive features in helping the students know how to aim high. Parents receive updated information on how well their children are doing every term across subjects and are invited to conferences with teachers to discuss progress and achievements. In addition, parents of younger students can examine their child's learning portfolio. Marking across the school, though encouraging and sometimes linked in well to a specific rubric, does not consistently inform students about how they can improve their work.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

Students have outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Their cultural and multicultural understanding and appreciation is exemplary, greatly enriched by a wide range of educational visits and the bi-annual international festival hosted by parents. Relationships are racially harmonious with absolute consideration shown for one another. Older students are excellent role models for younger ones. Students new to the school comment on the warm welcome they receive. They benefit from having a 'buddy' and settle in quickly as a result. Students make a good contribution to the smooth running of the school and take seriously their responsibilities, as, for example, school council members or school counsellors. Students value highly the awards that are presented at assemblies for their personal qualities of caring and contribution to the community.

Students have very good attendance and really enjoy school because of the wide range of exciting experiences provided. They know they all have talents and skills and are encouraged by staff to do their best and try hard, which they do. By the time they are ready to move on to the next stage of education, students are very well prepared, with very good literacy, numeracy and ICT skills, further enhancing their ability to meet new challenges and opportunities with confidence. Students' behaviour is outstanding and they are highly confident, extremely articulate, very well-mannered and sensible young adults. From an early age students are developing a strong sense of right and wrong and a good set of values and principles by which to live that will serve them well as future world citizens.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The school has good strategies in place for safeguarding students' welfare, health and safety. Detailed child protection procedures are rigorously applied and appropriate training is completed by new members of staff prior to taking up their

position. Support staff have attended recent recruitment training and appropriate checks are made on all new appointments. These procedures meet the requirements but currently there is no overall supervision of the completion of these checks. Highly qualified staff ensure there is good day-to-day medical support and suitable arrangements are in place for first aid. There is an appropriate and effective behaviour policy in place and incidents of inappropriate behaviour are extremely rare. Students report that they feel safe in school and say that there is very little bullying. Risk assessments are comprehensive and produced to a high standard. All aspects of health and safety are well planned and the school has clearly understood procedures. The school's systems to ensure fire safety are thorough and regularly enforced. The systems to monitor and encourage good attendance are comprehensive and daily registers are maintained in conformity with regulations. The school has made good provision to increase accessibility in line with the Disability Discrimination Act and will be drawing up further plans to review the possibility of more improvements.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

Appropriate checks are made to ensure the suitability of staff to work with children. Extra care is taken to complete additional checks for overseas teachers and their right to work in the United Kingdom. The school has instigated procedures to satisfy themselves of the medical fitness of staff prior to taking up their post.

School's premises and accommodation

All aspects of the accommodation are outstanding and make a very strong contribution to the quality of students' education and personal well-being. Imaginative building design and development have ensured the addition of an outstanding theatre for the expressive arts. Specialist areas such as the libraries, ICT suites, gymnasiums, fitness centre and medical room are of a high quality. The buildings are meticulously maintained. Students' impressive artwork continues to adorn the walls around the school.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. For many no praise is too high; in the words of one parent the school has 'figured out an inspiring balance between academics, teaching, social behaviour and having an enjoyable time'. The school's attractive and informative website provides easy access to a wide range of information. Parents have access to a summary of the staff's qualifications and the leadership structure. The school intends to add details of the new directors' posts to the site in the next few days.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school has clear written procedures to deal with complaints. Disagreements are rare and are resolved informally. There have been no formal written complaints to the school in the last academic year. While the school's policy makes clear the right to appeal to a separate committee of the board of trustees, there is currently no independent member of that committee.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

The overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage is outstanding. Children's language, mathematical and creative skills are very well developed and they are extremely well equipped for the next step in their education. Children's independence is good and they are confident in making choices and expressing their ideas. They have a good understanding of being healthy, carefully washing their hands before eating a snack of fruit. Children enjoy climbing on specially designed outdoor equipment making good progress in their physical development. Provision for children's learning is good. Children develop their interests in a richly resourced learning environment. Overall, there is a good balance between adult-led and child-initiated activities. Children's work is assessed thoroughly and staff make effective use of the children's interests to accelerate their learning. The outdoor area has been designed with advice from an occupational therapist; however, children do not have free-flow access to the outdoors to develop their mark-making and counting skills.

Leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage is outstanding and their vision and drive are shared by a dedicated team. Very effective management and systems ensure children are safe and secure. There are excellent race relations and diverse cultures are celebrated. Those with special educational needs and/or difficulties are well supported and the inclusion of all children is outstanding. Partnership with parents is excellent and they are involved in the planning of children's learning.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended ('the Regulations'), with the exception of those listed below.³

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of procedures for handling complaints (standard 7) and must:

- ensure that the final complaints appeal panel includes a member who is independent from the school (paragraph 7 (g)).

³ www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2003/20031910.htm

What the school could do to improve further

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

School

- Ensure marking consistently informs pupils how they can improve their work.

Early Years Foundation Stage

- Enhance the provision by increasing the opportunities for children to independently access the outdoor areas.

Inspection judgement recording form

outstanding	good	satisfactory	inadequate
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The quality of education

Overall quality of education	√			
How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of pupils	√			
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of pupils' needs	√			
How well pupils make progress in their learning	√			

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	√			
The behaviour of pupils	√			

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils		√		
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The quality of the Early Years Foundation Stage provision

How good are the outcomes for children in the EYFS?	√			
What is the quality of provision in the EYFS?		√		
How effectively is the EYFS led and managed?	√			
Overall effectiveness: how well does the school meet the needs of children in the EYFS?	√			

The quality of boarding provision

Evaluation of boarding provision				
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School details

Name of school	The American School in London		
DCSF number	213/6215		
Unique reference number	101168		
Type of school	Co-educational day school		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	1951		
Age range of pupils	4–18		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 657	Girls: 657	Total: 1314
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 64	Girls: 44	Total: 108
Annual fees (day pupils)	£17,780 - £20,800		
Address of school	1 Waverley Place London NW8 0NP		
Telephone number	020 7449 1200		
Fax number	020 7449 1350		
Email address	admissions@asl.org		
Headteacher	Mrs Coreen Hester		
Proprietor	American School in London Educational Trust		
Reporting inspector	Mr Mark Lindfield HMI		
Dates of inspection	10–11 November 2009		