

Inspection report
The American School in London
Independent school
DfES ref no: 213/6215

Inspection under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002

Dates of inspection: 26 - 27 September 2006

Introduction

Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by the Office for Standards in Education under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002 as part of pilot inspection arrangements 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 American School in London is a co-educational day school for students aged between 4 and 18 years. It is situated in St John's Wood in north London. The school follows an American structure and is organised into three departments: the lower, middle and high schools. Although the majority of students hold American citizenship, the school has a strong international flavour with over 50 countries represented. Less than a tenth of the students speak a principal language other than English. A little over half of these require additional support in the subject. The school provides additional learning support to nearly one-fifth of the students although none of them have a statement of special educational need. The school's stated mission is to provide an 'American education of the highest quality' to the families it serves. The school functions as an important cultural centre for American families in London and maintains close links with the American Embassy.

Overall evaluation of the school

The school provides its students with an outstanding education. The extremely well resourced learning environment caters effectively for their needs, interests and abilities. The school also makes outstanding provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Consequently, they become highly articulate and independent learners. They make outstanding progress, achieve high standards and are very well prepared for the next phase in their education.

The curriculum is outstanding, in particular the quality of provision for the performing and visual arts. The extremely broad curriculum is well supported by a suitable range of schemes of work and programmes. Students study English, mathematics, science, physical education (PE), technology, social studies, music, drama, health and art. In addition, they have access to a range of modern foreign languages, such as, Italian in the Kindergarten and Russian and Japanese in the High School. Field trips are an important and integral aspect of the curriculum as is the development of library skills. The Kindergarten environment for children between the ages of four and six is exciting and stimulating. Here, learning is based on integrated play and covers all aspects of their academic, personal and physical development. In the lower school, a strength of the curriculum is that it builds on what students already know and enables them to practice new skills across different subjects. This enables students to make sense of what they are learning quickly. In the middle and high schools, the curriculum excels in ensuring that students follow courses that have been tailored to their particular needs and abilities. The richness

across and within subjects provides them with options that suit their aptitudes and interests. Students benefit from a range of visitors such as well-known authors and illustrators who bring a real-life and exciting dimension to the curriculum. Students are well prepared for the next stage in their education and all of them graduate and move on to college.

The quality of teaching and assessment is outstanding. It is consistently good; some of it is inspirational and generates a lot of excitement and fun. It meets the full range of students' needs including those who have additional learning difficulties. Teachers have very good knowledge of the subjects they teach, which is a reflection of the strong emphasis that the school places on professional development. Teachers use a range of teaching methods very effectively to motivate and enthuse the students. For example, quick exercises before a handwriting lesson helped the students to 'wake up' their muscles, and in a science lesson, there was healthy competition between students to find out who had the fastest reaction time. This led to all students enjoying and participating in the lesson. Most of the students have access to laptop computers, and teachers use information and communication technology (ICT) with a high degree of sophistication to support teaching and learning across the curriculum. They have very high expectations of learning and behaviour, and the excellent relationships that students enjoy with adults translate into impeccable behaviour in lessons. Assessment systems are rigorous and enable teachers to track the progress of each student through the school. Teachers provide students with clear academic guidance, which is underpinned by a very thorough knowledge of their needs. They use the information gleaned from assessments very effectively to decide the most appropriate learning experiences and courses for students.

As a result of the excellent curriculum provision and outstanding teaching, the students' ability to learn is fostered from a very early age, particularly through project work. As they progress further up the school, they increasingly become highly confident and independent learners and by the time they leave the school, students have mastered the art of learning. They develop a range of skills including self-study, presentation and interpersonal skills. They are studious and apply themselves to tasks diligently. All students, but especially those with additional learning needs or difficulties, receive high quality support and this enables them to make excellent progress and achieve highly.

The school places a high priority on students' personal development and the provision for their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. The school helps students to develop into extremely mature young people who are able to think for themselves. Teachers are very successful in fostering students' enjoyment of school and their positive attitudes towards learning. Students have plenty to say, with much that is worth listening to. They know what they like about school and make sensible suggestions about what could be better. The Head of School, Principals and staff set high expectations of behaviour and attendance, which all students meet successfully. Counsellors play a significant role in helping each student to feel special and valued. A consequence of this excellent provision is that students are polite, friendly to visitors and very supportive of one another. They

form a cohesive family group, and the older students act as very good role models for the younger ones. Students understand their responsibilities to others and to the broader community. They have opportunities to play a major role in the life of the school, for example, by performing in the drama productions. Within the wider community, they demonstrate social responsibility by supporting schools in other parts of the world such as India and by raising money for various charities. Their preparation for adulthood is reinforced appropriately through activities such as the outdoor leadership course, where they learn to work as a team and to depend on each other. The rich diversity of ethnicities within the school provides many opportunities for them to appreciate one another's cultures. This is enhanced further by visits abroad and the study of modern foreign languages. Mutual respect underpins the racial harmony and positive relationships that are evident around the school. Students get on well together, and friendships are formed regardless of heritage.

Arrangements to ensure the welfare, health and safety of students are good. However, the policy to prevent bullying is in draft form and has not yet been presented to parents. Even so, instances of bullying are extremely rare. Students are confident that staff will respond effectively should any incidents of bullying arise. Students benefit greatly from a very effective health education programme, which ensures that they know how to keep safe. This programme combines with other successful aspects of provision, such as PE, to ensure that students understand the importance of taking regular exercise and having a healthy diet. The school has effective procedures for listening to and acting upon students' views through the middle and high school councils. Despite this, a significant number of older students do not feel sufficiently involved in decision-making in the school. Arrangements to ensure child protection are suitable. The school undertakes the full range of checks to ensure the suitability of all staff to work with children and young people.

All aspects of the accommodation are outstanding and make a very positive contribution to the curriculum at every stage. Students appreciate the thought and attention paid to the surroundings in which they learn and play. Parents agree and feel that this shows a high level of respect for their children. Specialist areas for subjects, such as ICT and science, are excellent. The library facilities provide exemplary support for all subjects. The gyms, cardiovascular unit and external play surfaces are of a similarly high standard and contribute very well to the sporting achievement of individual students and the school. Students' artwork of the highest quality adorns the walls and helps to create a positive atmosphere that celebrates achievement.

Detailed and comprehensive information is contained in the handbook for prospective parents, some of which is also on the school website. A dynamic use of ICT through emails, the website and group presentations ensures that parents keep up-to-date with what is happening in the school. All parents who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire, report that they are happy with the information they receive and with the progress their children make. 'Parent/teacher' and student-led conferences ensure a strong partnership between the school and the home. These enable parents to help their children learn and develop even further. The school

does not yet have an agreed written procedure for making formal complaints. As a result, it is unable to provide this information together with the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year to parents. Nonetheless, parents attest to the 'open door' approach by all staff and feel that concerns are always dealt with in a sensitive and prompt manner.

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 those listed below.

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of welfare, health and safety, of pupils (standard 3) and must:

- complete the process of drafting a written policy to prevent bullying and ensure that it has regard to the Department for Education and Science guidance (DfES 0064/2000): "Bullying: don't suffer in silence" (paragraph 3(2)(a)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the provision of information to parents (standard 6), and must make available, and make it clear that parents of students and of prospective students may request:

- the written anti-bullying policy (paragraph 6(2)(h)); and
- details of the complaints procedure adopted by the school, together with details of the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year (paragraph 6(2)(j)).

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

- produce and implement a written complaints procedure that meets all the requirements of the regulations (paragraphs 7(a) to (k)).

What the school could do to improve further

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

- Provide students with increased opportunities to participate in decision-making.

School details

Name of school:	The American School in London
DfES Number:	213/6215
Type of school:	Co-educational day school
Status:	Independent
Date school opened:	1951
Age range of students:	4 - 18
Gender of students:	Mixed
Number on roll :	Boys: 689 Girls: 652 Total: 1341
Annual fees (day students):	£15,870 - £19,440
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:	Dr William C Mules
Proprietor:	The American School in London Educational Trust
Reporting Inspector:	Florence Olajide AI
Dates of inspection:	26 - 27 September 2006

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