

# Westminster Cathedral Choir School

Inspection report for boarding school

---

<b>Unique reference number</b>	SC010896
<b>Inspection date</b>	31 January 2008
<b>Inspector</b>	Sharon Lewis
<b>Type of Inspection</b>	Key

---

<b>Address</b>	Choir School Ambrosden Avenue LONDON SW1P 1QH
<b>Telephone number</b>	020 77989081
<b>Email</b>	office@choirschool.com
<b>Registered person</b>	Westminster Roman Catholic Diocesan Trustee
<b>Head of care</b>	Neil McLaughlan
<b>Head / Principal</b>	Neil McLaughlan
<b>Date of last inspection</b>	11 January 2005

---

© Crown copyright 2008

Website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

You can obtain copies of The Children Act 2004, Every Child Matters and The National Minimum Standards for Children's Services from: The Stationery Office (TSO) PO Box 29, St Cripins, Duke Street, Norwich, NR3 1GN. Tel: 0870 600 5522. Online ordering: [www.tso.co.uk/bookshop](http://www.tso.co.uk/bookshop)

## About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcome for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and relevant National Minimum Standards for the establishment.

## The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding:	this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
Good:	this aspect of the provision is strong
Satisfactory:	this aspect of the provision is sound
Inadequate:	this aspect of the provision is not good enough

## Service information

### Brief description of the service

Westminster Cathedral Choir School is the only Roman Catholic choir school in the country. All boarders are choristers and are an integral part of the Cathedral community. Boys are admitted from the age of eight until the age of 13. Choristers sing everyday during term time, the exception being on Wednesdays. The choir's duties extend to national and international engagements. Admission follows informal and formal voice trials. Every chorister receives formal musical tuition and the school prepares boys for Common Entrance and scholarships to leading public schools. The boys have opportunities to see their parents regularly every weekend. The school has a new headmaster and head of boarding. At the time of the inspection the school had 27 choristers.

### Summary

The purpose of this full announced inspection is to ensure that the boarding provision safeguards and promotes the welfare of the choristers. All key standards were examined. Most parents are exceptionally happy with the care and education their sons receive. Some of the choristers have a positive experience of boarding. However choristers' questionnaires and group discussions highlight concerns, in relation to the management of bullying. Over a quarter of the choristers complained in their questionnaires that they were being bullied. The school's current countering bullying, behaviour management, risk assessment systems and child protection procedures are unsatisfactory. This impacts on the safety and organisational outcome area being inadequate. This inadequate judgement has effected the boarding school's overall judgment. Choristers benefit from a good outcome in relation to the health arrangements. The outcome areas relating to enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution and economic wellbeing were satisfactory. The school acknowledges the need for more robust safeguarding practices and plan to further address this issue.

The overall quality rating is inadequate.

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

### Improvements since the last inspection

At the last inspection the school had seven recommendations to improve the environment and facilities for the choristers. Five of these recommendations have been appropriately addressed. The school were asked to reconfigure the senior dormitory to allow for new beds, more privacy and storage space beds. Choristers have new furniture and beds which have been arranged to maximise private space. Improvements were recommended for the ground floor area. The school were asked to arrange for the second telephone area to be soundproof or for mobile handsets to be available for the choristers. Choristers have access to another telephone in the soundproofed music room. The school were asked to produce a fire risk assessment for the premises. This has been completed which contributes to better fire safety procedures. Two recommendations are repeated. The school were asked to provide lockable storage space for all choristers. Senior boarders have lockable cupboards in their bedroom furniture. Junior boarders do not have this facility, having to bring in their own lockable tins. It was recommended that an increased number of toilets be included in the future development plans. Phase one of the refurbishment plans will not include toilets in the boarding area. Additional toilets will be available on the ground floor of the school building.

## **Helping children to be healthy**

The provision is good.

Choristers benefit from the range of health policies and facilities available at the school. Choristers have access to a matron throughout the week and weekends. A matron may also accompany the choristers on tour. A registered nurse is available for the treatment of minor illnesses and there are qualified first aiders among the boarding staff. The school has an attached doctor who visits every fortnight. Choristers externally access the optician, dentist and other health professionals. Choristers receive good quality medical treatment and first aid. The school maintains appropriate health records which contain information from parents, allergies and the reasons for taking specific medications. Files confirm that parents give their consent to the administering of medication, first aid and for the Headmaster to act in the best interests of each child. The medication policy, procedure and practice guidance specifically addresses the use of non-prescribed medication. Medication is securely stored in lockable purpose built cabinets. Staff encourage the choristers to take their medication under their supervision. The school has a designated sick bay within the matron's office. Pictures on the walls assist with making the environment more comfortable. Toys are also available to assist with occupying the boy's time. Choristers who are ill receive regular supervision and the matron appropriately informs parents. Matrons assist with emotional as well as physical ailments. Matrons are aware of the personal demands of boarding and being a chorister. Matrons respond appropriately to psychological needs. Staff are able to discuss personal, health and social matters with the choristers during their educational lessons. The school is one of the first in the country to implement a new South American programme, which covers this topic. The aim is to teach this integrated programme in stages throughout the school years. Choristers should receive information on sexual health, smoking, alcohol, illegal substance and solvent abuse within their science and Personal Social and Health Education curriculum. The choristers enjoy a nutritious and balanced diet. Menus include various choices, culturally appropriate food and new dishes. Fresh fruit and vegetables are always available. The choristers appreciate the new cafeteria style dining arrangements. The dining area, furnishings, cutlery and crockery are of a good standard. The choristers receive three meals daily and are able to have second helpings. The school acknowledges the choristers' lengthy days. Snacks time are part of their daily programme. Drinking water is readily available. The choristers generally feel the meals are very good. However, their only wish is for more substantial mid morning and late afternoon snacks.

## **Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe**

The provision is inadequate.

The school does not have an effective policy on countering bullying. The short anti bullying policy is available to choristers, parents and staff. A proportion of choristers and staff report that bullying does take place amongst the boarders. Choristers had little confidence in the management of bullying. A selection of boarders do not feel that staff respond appropriately to bullying. Some choristers feel that they would keep their concerns to themselves. Staff receive compulsory child protection training as part of their induction. The school responds to child protection allegations appropriately and works in partnership with local authorities. The school has a very brief safeguarding children policy, which gives limited guidance to staff. The policy does not refer to the London Child Protection procedures. The school has plans to address this shortfall with the involvement of a representative from the local authority. The school has a good relationship with the community police service, a recent visit highlighting the precautions to protect their personal safety. The school has policies in relation to acceptable behaviour,

discipline, punishments, rewards and restraint. The management of behaviour is usually based on the use of sanctions. Choristers are aware of the standards of acceptable behaviour. Choristers comment on the varying use of sanctions. The school does not appropriately address persistent poor behaviour. Staff do not consistently follow the behaviour management policy. This results in unacceptable behaviour being allowed to continue, without comprehensive follow up. The school do not have a written reward system to promote socially acceptable behaviour. The complaints procedure is available to choristers, parents and staff. The school maintains a record of all complaints. The parent's handbook mentions the option of referring complaints to Ofsted. Choristers receive protection from the comprehensive fire safety precautions. This includes regular fire drills, alarm tests and checking of fire safety equipment. The choristers sleeping, living and recreational areas are free of significant hazards. Windows in their dormitories have suitable opening restrictors. The school has a health and safety policy. Currently, however, there is not a designated person appointed who holds responsibility for health and safety. Staff recruitment and checks of school staff including 'gap' students, cathedral and personnel staff complies with the standards and requirements. The school, however, do not undertake checks on host families who may provide accommodation for choristers when touring. There is also no reference to safe caring guidance for these arrangements. The school has a security system to prevent unauthorised people accessing the building. Visitors enter through a security gate at reception. There are security pads throughout the building. Visitors receive appropriate supervision. The school does not have a building risk assessment. The school undertake risk assessments of school trips and choristers' tours. Risk assessments are not available for weekend trips or other visits which relate to choristers' duties.

### **Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do**

The provision is satisfactory.

Choristers welcome the introduction of increased leisure time. The new headmaster makes great efforts to ensure that any onerous demands on choristers does not adversely affect their welfare. Various social clubs are available after school. Clubs include football, fencing, judo, drama, chess, art and information technology. These activities are very popular with all pupils, therefore, they may be oversubscribed. Choristers would appreciate the provision of a greater range of activities. Weekends give the choristers a chance to spend time with their families. If their parents do not visit, choristers sometimes enjoy trips to the museum or cinema with boarding house staff. The boarding staff plan to introduce a weekend activity programme. This will include inviting parents to accompany them. Choristers are able to contribute their ideas for future excursions. Choristers' questionnaires identify they have a member of staff they can go to for personal support. The school provides guidance for staff and about how such support is provided. Each chorister receives this information; it is also on display throughout the boarding house. Choristers have access to an independent person who is part of the Cathedral staff. Discussions with choristers highlights they may keep concerns to themselves. One of the reasons being they would fear being judged. Information relating to Childline is also available. The school promotes an ethos of tolerance and respect for diversity and equality. Pupils benefit from a good special educational needs support system. A range of innovative resources and interventions enables pupils with learning difficulties to maximise their potential. Choristers are able to undertake private study in the library and use facilities in the computer room. There is an outdoor and indoor recreation area. Outdoors choristers have access to the playground area. Indoors is a common room which includes a piano, pool table, table football, television, DVD player, PlayStation, books and a choice of board games. Choristers express the wish for

more leisure space, particularly somewhere quiet to read and relax. Currently they are unable to use their dormitories during free periods.

### **Helping children make a positive contribution**

The provision is satisfactory.

Choristers have the opportunity to informally feedback their views. The headmaster makes an effort to visit the choristers to discuss their well being. The daily evening assembly enables them to voice their opinions in a larger group. The nature of the choristers' roles promotes their interest in the outside world. Choristers have the opportunity to interact with other choir schools. The 'Chorister for the Day' event enables Catholic families from diverse backgrounds to consider a chorister education for their sons. The school seeks to encourage positive relationships between themselves, families and the staff at the school. The school provides some support for boarders' family and parental contact. Two payphones are available and choristers may use other phones in the event of an emergency. A parents' coffee morning is held every Sunday. The head of boarding sends a weekly email to parents. This informs parents of any developments and encourages their response to matters relating to their children.

### **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is satisfactory.

The school provides a satisfactory standard of accommodation for its boarders at the top of the main school building. Accommodation is clean, has appropriate heating, ventilation and lighting. Separate dormitories are available for the junior and senior choristers on two different floors. Being within Central London the premises are compact. The school is considering alternate options and plans are in progress of developing the main school building. Choristers have their own beds and adequate storage space. Lockable storage space is available for senior choristers. Choristers are able to personalise their designated areas and show their individuality with their own choice of bedding. Choristers share a common room which has a range of leisure facilities and soft seating. The choristers would like more comfortable seating. The school hope to introduce more homely furnishings. A common room notice board displays general information, photos of the choristers on tour and newspaper clippings. The bathroom includes rows of washbasins and four showers. A toilet is available on each floor. The main bathroom includes a urinal area. The bathroom area has limited privacy. The toilet on the junior floor has rusty pipe work and the toilet cistern is not secure.

### **Organisation**

The organisation is inadequate.

Safeguarding of the choristers' welfare is currently unsatisfactory, this has an impact on the overall organisation. The culture of bullying, incomplete risk management system and limited child protection procedures does not promote positive outcomes for all children. The school has new leadership. The headmaster started in September 2007 and the head of boarding commenced duties in January 2008. The headmaster's shadowing of a choristers day, provides an insight into the chorister's daily routine. The headmaster's understanding of this schedule contributes to the appreciated increase in their leisure time. Parents and choristers generally comment on the positive improvements since the school's management changes. The school's self assessment highlights further areas of development. The new leadership demonstrates the personal qualities and commitment to service improvement. The majority of parents feel their children receive excellent care and education. A governing body assists in the monitoring of

the choristers' welfare. There are sufficient staff to meet chorister needs. House staff includes the matron, senior housemaster, an assistant housemaster and 'gap' students. Staff receive training in health and safety, child protection but not pastoral care. There is a shared staff training record and no system to monitor staff performance. Senior boarding staff do not have training in the management and practice of boarding. There is an informal record monitoring system. The statement of boarding principles covers the aims and organisation of boarding at the school. This document is subject to regular review and is available for choristers, staff and parents. Choristers have the opportunity to reflect on these principles during their evening assembly. Choristers have a written guide which summarises their general questions. A parent's handbook covers the main ethos and procedures of the school. Boarding staff do not have a specific handbook which relates to the boarding provision.

## What must be done to secure future improvement?

### Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person meets the Care Standards Act 2000, and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider must comply with the given timescales.

Standard	Action	Due date
----------	--------	----------

### Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- provide more substantial snacks for choristers during mid morning and late afternoon breaks [NMS 24]
- implement a comprehensive anti-bullying strategy, which is subject to regular review [NMS 2]
- produce a more detailed safeguarding children policy, in accordance with London wide child protection procedures [NMS3]
- implement a consistent punishment and reward system, with comprehensive follow up [NMS 4]
- produce risk assessments for the building and choristor activities [NMS 47]
- appoint a person who holds responsibility for health and safety [NMS 47]
- endeavour to undertake checks on host families and provide safe caring guidance, to safeguard choristers' welfare [NMS 52]
- provide a greater range of activities in choristers' free time [NMS 11]
- consider providing access to an independent person not connected to the Cathedral [NMS 14]
- provide a greater range of recreational areas [NMS 46]
- make the boarding house area more homely [NMS 40]
- secure the toilet cistern in the junior chorister toilet [NMS 44]
- ensure the pipe work in the junior chorister toilet is appropriately maintained [NMS 44]

- ensure future development plans include an increase in the numbers of toilets available for boarders [NMS 44]
- produce a boarding staff handbook, in accordance with the London Child Protection Procedures [NMS 35]
- provide pastoral care training for boarding staff [NMS 34]
- ensure senior boarding staff have training in the management and practice of boarding [NMS 8]
- introduce an individual staff appraisal system and provide individual staff training records [NMS 34]
- monitor regularly records which contribute to the boarders' welfare. [NMS 23].

## Annex

## Annex A

### National Minimum Standards for boarding school

#### Being healthy

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- boarders' health is promoted (NMS 6)
- safeguarding and promoting boarders' health and welfare are supported by appropriate records (NMS 7)
- boarders' receive first aid and health care as necessary (NMS 15)
- boarders are adequately supervised and looked after when ill (NMS 16)
- boarders are supported in relation to any health or personal problems (NMS 17)
- boarders receive good quality catering provision (NMS 24)
- boarders have access to food and drinking water in addition to main meals (NMS 25)
- boarders are suitably accommodated when ill (NMS 48)
- boarders' clothing and bedding are adequately laundered (NMS 49).

**Ofsted considers 6 and 15 the key standards to be inspected.**

#### Staying safe

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- boarders are protected from bullying (NMS 2)
- boarders are protected from abuse (NMS 3)
- use of discipline with boarders is fair and appropriate (NMS 4)
- boarders' complaints are responded to appropriately (NMS 5)
- the operation of any prefect system safeguards and promotes boarders' welfare (NMS 13)
- boarders' welfare is protected in any appointment of educational guardians by the school (NMS 22)
- boarders are protected from the risk of fire (NMS 26)
- the welfare of any children other than the school's pupils is safeguarded and promoted while accommodated by the school (NMS 28)
- boarders' safety and welfare are protected during high risk activities (NMS 29)
- boarders' personal privacy is respected (NMS 37)
- there is vigorous selection and vetting of all staff and volunteers working with boarders (NMS 38)
- boarders are protected from unsupervised contact at school with adults who have not been subject to the school's complete recruitment checking procedures; all unchecked visitors to the boarding premises are supervised (NMS 39)
- boarders have their own accommodation, which is secure from public intrusion (NMS 41)
- boarders are protected from safety hazards (NMS 47)

**Ofsted considers 2, 3, 4, 5, 26, 37, 38, 39, 41 and 47 the key standards to be inspected.**

#### Enjoying and achieving

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- boarders have access to a range and choice of activities (NMS 11)
- boarders do not experience inappropriate discrimination (NMS 18)
- boarders' welfare is not compromised by unusual or onerous demands (NMS 27)
- boarders have satisfactory provision to study (NMS 43)
- boarders have access to a range of safe recreational areas (NMS 46)

**Ofsted considers 14 and 18 the key standards to be inspected.**

**Annex A**

### **Making a positive contribution**

**The intended outcomes for these standards are:**

- boarders are enabled to contribute to the operation of boarding in the school (NMS 12)
- boarders receive personal support from staff (NMS 14)
- boarders can maintain private contact with their parents and families (NMS 19)
- new boarders are introduced to the school's procedures and operation, and are enabled to settle in (NMS 21)
- boarders have appropriate access to information and facilities outside the school (NMS 30)
- there are sound relationships between staff and boarders (NMS 36)

**Ofsted considers 12 and 19 the key standards to be inspected.**

### **Achieving economic well-being**

**The intended outcomes for these standards are:**

- boarders' possessions and money are protected (NMS 20)
- boarders are provided with satisfactory accommodation (NMS 40)
- boarders have satisfactory sleeping accommodation (NMS 42)
- boarders have adequate private toilet and washing facilities (NMS 44)
- boarders have satisfactory provision for changing by day (NMS 45)
- boarders can obtain personal requisites while accommodated at school (NMS 50)

**Ofsted considers 51 the key standard to be inspected.**

### **Organisation**

**The intended outcomes for these standards are:**

- a suitable statement of the school's principles and practice should be available to parents, boarders and staff (NMS 1)
- there is clear leadership of boarding in the school (NMS 8)
- crises affecting boarders' welfare are managed effectively (NMS 9)
- the school's organisation of boarding contributes to boarders' welfare (NMS 10)
- risk assessment and school record-keeping contribute to boarders' welfare (NMS 23)
- boarders are supervised adequately by staff (NMS 31)
- staff exercise appropriate supervision of boarders leaving the school site (NMS 32)
- boarders are adequately supervised at night (NMS 33)
- boarders are looked after by staff which have specific boarding duties, and have received adequate induction and continued training (NMS 34)
- boarders are looked after by staff which follow clear boarding policies and practice (NMS 35)
- the welfare of boarders placed in lodgings is safeguarded and promoted (NMS 51)
- the welfare of boarders is safeguarded and promoted while accommodated away from the school site on short-term visits (NMS 52)

**Ofsted considers 1, 23, 31 and 34 the key standards to be inspected.**