



# Westminster Abbey Choir School Volunteer Application Pack

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Independent Person

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Westminster Abbey Choir School



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# A Letter from the Headteacher

Dear Prospective Candidate,

Thank you for your interest in Westminster Abbey Choir School. Our school is an incredibly special place. The pupils at our school are articulate, thoughtful and incredibly responsible young people. Their love of learning and exceptional musical talents mean that they are a joy to teach. As a full boarding community, the Choir School can often feel like an extended family and relationships between the boys are generally excellent. The staff team are an integral support network and work hard to ensure that all of our boarders cope with the significant demands of their busy schedule.

We are looking for an empathetic individual to volunteer as an Independent Person (formerly Independent Listener) at our school. Here at Westminster Abbey Choir School, we have a system whereby any child who wishes to talk to an independent adult can do so. This is open to all students, and pupils are informed of who this person is and how to contact them. Our school is unique because it only educates the Choristers of Westminster Abbey and so the school has up to 30 pupils only at any one time.

If you have any questions about the role, I would be delighted to answer them and I can be contacted through my PA, Jennifer Benjamin at [headteacher@westminster-abbey.org](mailto:headteacher@westminster-abbey.org). I can thoroughly recommend working at the Choir School – I may be biased, but I think it is a once in a lifetime opportunity!

Best wishes,



Dr Emma Margrett  
Headteacher



# About Westminster Abbey Choir School

Westminster Abbey Choir School is a remarkable school. It exists to educate and care for around 30 boy choristers of Westminster Abbey. Unique amongst choir schools, Westminster Abbey Choir School admits only singing boys, who are boarders in the relative peace and calm of Dean's Yard in the centre of London. It is thus a small, tightly knit community, with a strong sense of shared purpose both among pupils and between pupils and teachers. The school has a warm, cooperative atmosphere in which flexibility and teamwork are key to the smooth running of the boys' busy timetable.

Boys are selected by audition and academic test at the age of seven to start at the school in Year 4. At age 13 they normally move on to one of a wide range of leading schools, to which the great majority win music scholarships.

In addition to providing outstanding musical training, Westminster Abbey Choir School also maintains a full academic curriculum leading to the Common Entrance Examination at 13+, and in some cases to academic scholarships to senior schools. High standards are expected of both pupils and teachers. This inevitably makes for a busy weekly schedule in which academic and musical commitments have to be balanced.

The school is generously staffed with eight full time and three part time academic staff, eight support staff and over 15 peripatetic music staff. As a department of Westminster Abbey, the school forms part of the Abbey's overall administrative structure drawing on its maintenance, finance, IT and human resources departments.

In a school of this size, staff get to know each boy very well indeed and several of the staff live on the premises. Central to the school's ethos is an informal, supportive atmosphere in which all of its members – pupils and staff – treat one another with consideration and respect. Indeed, this culture is common to the whole community of Westminster Abbey.

The close relationship with Westminster Abbey brings a special dimension to the school. The boys sing in the Abbey almost every day of the week and develop a special affinity and love for this church, which is both an ancient place of Christian worship and a high-profile national symbol. They are regularly called upon to sing at special occasions such as the state funeral of HM Queen Elizabeth II and the Coronation of HM King Charles III. They also give public concerts both here and abroad, and make recordings.

Outside the normal run of singing and academic lessons, there is a busy programme of extra-curricular activities. In addition to the usual array of sports, boys may be found in a range of pastimes, from sailing and rock-climbing to origami and chess. A special feature of the school year are the periods leading up to Christmas and Easter when the choristers are required to sing in Westminster Abbey. The boys eagerly look forward to these periods and the school continues with a programme of seasonal events.

The school is committed to safeguarding and protecting the welfare of children and young people, and expects all staff and volunteers to share this commitment. Details of the safeguarding policy can be found on the Choir School website: <http://www.westminster-abbey.org/safeguarding-rse/> and a summary is provided in Appendix 1.

# About Westminster Abbey

Above all else, the Abbey is a church, a place of prayer and praise and holy ground at the heart of the nation. It is also a treasured part of Britain's heritage and a leading venue for tourism. The Abbey has occupied a central place in the celebration of great events for the nation and remains one of the most beautiful architectural masterpieces in Britain.

A living Church, Westminster Abbey is where the coronation of Kings and Queens has taken place since 1066, and where many of the Kings and Queens of England and of the United Kingdom are buried. Principal among them is St Edward the Confessor, King of England from 1042 to 1066, whose shrine is at the heart of the Abbey Church. Beside and around them are buried or commemorated many of the great women and men from almost every century of British history: statesmen and politicians, lawyers, warriors, clerics, writers, artists, musicians.

Neither a cathedral nor a parish church, Westminster Abbey (or the Collegiate Church of St Peter in Westminster to give it its correct title) is a Royal Peculiar under the jurisdiction of a Dean and Chapter and with direct accountability to the Sovereign. This relationship with the Sovereign dates back to the origins of the Abbey over a millennium ago, but its current form stems from the Charter granted to the Abbey by Elizabeth on 21<sup>st</sup> May 1560.

We are a welcoming community, but also complex and multi-faceted, with nearly 600 highly committed employees and volunteers. We have deep respect for the heritage of which we are the custodians, but we evolve continuously to meet the opportunities of the future. In recent times this has included the creation of new departments to focus on transforming our digital presence and delivering a significantly expanded programme of public and community engagement. In addition, our newly created Employee Engagement Forum and Social Engagement Statement is helping us to support and develop our staff and volunteers. We have also reshaped our governance arrangements, including a new Strategic Board to help us navigate the challenges and opportunities of the coming decades.

## **Westminster Abbey's mission is:**

- To offer daily divine Worship to Almighty God and resource the Church in this vocation;
- To serve the Sovereign;
- To proclaim the Gospel to the nation and Commonwealth, celebrating the distinctive witness of the Christian faith and engaging with the public square;
- To provide a safe, welcoming and inspiring environment for all who come to the Abbey;
- To act as responsible stewards of God's gifts.

## **Our Values:**

As one we serve each other, our visitors and the wider world in all we do with:

- Truthfulness
- Integrity
- Empathy
- Excellence

Following the State Funeral of Queen Elizabeth II and the Coronation of King Charles III and Queen Camilla, which were broadcast to national and international audiences in their millions, interest in the Abbey is very strong. We attract over a million visitors from around the world every year, and our summers and peak period are incredibly busy. However, we receive no regular income from the State, the Church of England or the Crown, and rely almost entirely on income from visitors.

**It is an exciting time to join the Abbey, and we look forward to receiving your application and if successful, welcoming your contribution to the Abbey's history.**

# Role Summary

**JOB TITLE:** Independent Person

**SUMMARY:** The school has a system whereby, any child who wishes to talk to an independent adult, can do so.

The National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools (NMS 2.3) requires the school to identify at least one person other than a parent, outside of the staff and those responsible for the leadership and governance of the school, who boarders may contact directly about personal problems or concerns at school. Boarders are informed who this person is, and how to contact them and they are easily accessible. Boarders are also provided with one or more appropriate helpline(s) or outside telephone numbers, including the Office of the Children's Commissioner to contact in case of problems or distress.

## **MAIN DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES:**

The Independent Person:

- The role is unpaid and voluntary and is independent of the main lines of school management.
- Will have a working knowledge of the school and is, through interest, experience and expertise, able to liaise with the students and the management of the school.
- Should have an interest and knowledge of the needs of junior boarders and the issues they face, being far distant from home during term time.
- Will be introduced to the students at the start of each academic year, via assemblies and will be expected to visit at least each term.
- Will provide a phone number that will be displayed on noticeboards around school and within the dormitories.
- Will be available by phone throughout the dates and daily time frames of the academic terms, and other times, where boarders are present e.g Christmas and Easter week.
- Will attend safeguarding training at least annually in line with the school's Safeguarding Policy and the direction of the Designated Safeguarding Lead.

# Further Information

## Introduction

All members of staff at Westminster Abbey Choir School are committed to ensuring that pupils are safe and feel they have someone with whom they can talk. The Independent Person is an additional point of contact.

The role of the Independent Person is to provide a source of impartial counsel and advice for pupils in the School (all pupils at Westminster Abbey Choir School are boarders). This is a confidential system and the Independent Person is under no obligation to inform the School of any contact with pupils, but will pass on welfare or safeguarding concerns to the School where appropriate.

## Appointment

The National Minimum Standards for Boarding require the School to identify at least one person other than a parent, outside the staff of the School and those responsible for the leadership and governance of the School, to whom boarders may turn about personal problems or concerns that they are facing.

## Accessibility

In order for pupils to feel able to contact the Independent Person, the Independent Person needs to be a recognisable figure and feel comfortable talking with them. To that end, the Independent Person will be invited to present at whole-School assemblies and congregations on a regular basis, as well as to visit boarding houses at the School.

## Support for Pupils

The contact details for the Independent Person, together with those for agencies such as ChildLine and other support groups, will be displayed around the School on noticeboards and in phone booths. Additionally, the contact numbers will also include the Office of the Children's Commissioner (freephone number 0800 528 0731) and email address (<http://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/help-at-hand>). Reminders of the role and contact details of the Independent Person will be issued to pupils by the Headteacher on an occasional basis and at least annually.

## Links with the School

Within the School, the primary point of contact for the Independent Person is the Deputy Head. An additional link is the Headteacher.

It is important that the Independent Person has a good sense of the way that the School operates and its customs and practices, the better to be able to contextualise and understand any observations made by pupils.

## Approach to Working

If contacted by a pupil, the Independent Person will provide an opportunity for the pupil to talk through any concerns or issues in a safe and non-discriminatory manner.

The Independent Person will take into account a pupil's perspective and will also present a balanced and reasonable response to the pupil's observations. The Independent Person is not expected to accept unquestioningly what they are told by either the pupil or those responsible for the pupil.

The Independent Person will encourage the pupil to participate in any decisions affecting them. Any grievances or disputes should ultimately follow the Complaints Policy.

Accurate and confidential records of any meetings will be taken. It must be remembered that any

safeguarding or child protection issues arising from conversations with pupils must be reported immediately to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) or the Local Authority or the Police, as appropriate.

### **Sharing Information**

Bearing in mind confidentiality, the Independent Person will, where appropriate, share information directly with the Deputy Head who is also the DSL.

The Independent Schools Inspectorate and other external agencies may contact the Independent Person to ask about the working relationship that exists between the School and the Independent Person, as well as to discuss specific issues that have been brought to their attention or any patterns of concern that might be able to be discerned.

### **Other Advocates**

It is expected that all pupils within the School will be able to identify a member of staff in whom they feel confident to share any concerns.

Beyond the School environment and the Independent Person, pupils are able to engage with a wide range of people, such as governors, external agencies, GPs and members of the Abbey clergy. If advice is needed, pupils are able to contact the Deputy Head and Headteacher for advice.

### **Additional Information**

Due to the close-knit environment in a full boarding community, applications from close family members of current choristers will not be considered.

# Volunteering with Westminster Abbey Choir School

## **Employment Status and Salary**

This post is unpaid and voluntary.

## **Appointment and Time Commitment**

Shortlisted candidates will be required to provide proof of their identity and right to volunteer in the UK when attending for interview.

Will be introduced to the students at the start of each academic year, via assemblies and will be expected to visit at least each term.

Will be available by phone throughout the dates and daily time frames of the academic terms, and other times, where boarders are present e.g Christmas and Easter week.

All appointments will be subject to satisfactory Enhanced Disclosure from the DBS and a minimum of two references satisfactory to the Choir School. Applicants should note that the school's policy is always to contact referees for verification of references and, in addition, follows best practice to ascertain the reasons for the termination of any previous employment in all cases where a candidate has worked with children.

## **Equality statement**

Westminster Abbey aims at all times to recruit the person who is most suited to the role.

The Abbey and the Choir School will ensure that their shortlisting, interviewing and selection procedures avoid discrimination in any way, including on grounds of age, disability, gender, marital status or civil partnership, race, nationality or ethnic origins, religion or belief and sexual orientation.

Please ensure the equality section of the online form is completed. This will help us monitor our recruitment practice. The equality form will not be seen by the people making the selection decision.

## **Safeguarding**

Westminster Abbey is committed to the safeguarding of children, young people and adults at risk. To prevent them from harm, we undertake appropriate checks on staff and volunteers and require them to complete relevant safeguarding training. Offers are subject to a relevant level of criminal record check, receipt of references satisfactory to Westminster Abbey, right to work in the UK, proof of professional qualifications and medical clearance, which will include a work health assessment through our occupational health provider.

# How to Apply

You are also advised to read the role description and person specification carefully and think about how your experience, skills and abilities help you to meet the requirements listed in the role description. Use the 'Supporting Statement' section of the form to tell us how you meet each of the requirements. Tell us about other relevant experience such as community and voluntary experience. Clear information on how you meet all the requirements of the job, with relevant examples, will help us with the selection decision, and we may not be able to shortlist you for interview if you do not provide this.

Please email your completed application form to: [applications@westminster-abbey.org](mailto:applications@westminster-abbey.org).

Your completed form should arrive no later than 12 noon on 28 June 2024.

## The Recruitment Process

Interviews are most likely to be held during the week commencing 1 July 2024.

If you would like to learn more about the post before applying then you are very welcome to contact the Headteacher of Westminster Abbey Choir School, Dr Emma Margrett, via her PA on 020 7654 4918 or email: [headteacher@westminster-abbey.org](mailto:headteacher@westminster-abbey.org).

Please also note that the school website contains further information which informally give an insight into life at the Choir School: <http://www.westminster-abbey.org/choir-school>.

