

The Blandford School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113888
Local Authority	Dorset
Inspection number	357447
Inspection dates	22–23 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Robert Pyner HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1106
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	161
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jill Stevens
Headteacher	Sally Wilson
Date of previous school inspection	16 January 2008
School address	Milldown Road Blandford Forum DT11 7SQ
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 34 lessons and observed the same number of teachers. They held meetings with senior and middle leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body and three governors, staff and groups of students. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at progress tracking and performance data, the school development plan, minutes from the governing body, students' work and numerous policies, guidelines, plans and reviews. The questionnaire responses from 141 parents and carers, 115 students and 84 staff were also analysed. At the time of the inspection, all Year 10 students were involved in work experience away from the school.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- How well different groups, particularly girls and lower ability students, make progress in their learning across the curriculum.
- The appropriateness of the curriculum to provide courses which maximise achievement and improve attendance for all groups, but particularly lower ability students.
- The extent to which teaching and learning offer support and challenge for all groups of students in order to raise attainment and accelerate progress.
- The accuracy and demonstrable impact of self-evaluation by leaders and managers at all levels in driving up outcomes for all groups of learners and the extent to which this demonstrates capacity for improvement.
- The quality of provision and leadership and management and their impact on student outcomes in the sixth form.

Information about the school

The Blandford School is larger than the average comprehensive and serves the town of Blandford Forum and surrounding rural area. Since 2003 the school has been a specialist technology college. Most students are from a White British heritage and the proportion known to be eligible for free school meals is lower than average. The percentage with special needs and/or disabilities is broadly average; students' needs include specific difficulties, communication disorders and behavioural, social and emotional support. The proportion with a statement of special educational needs is similar to the national figure. The school occupies a very large site and is in the final stages of an extensive building and refurbishment project which is due to be completed in 2013. Additionally, schools in the area were reorganised from a three- to a two-tier system five years ago. In 2010, the Year 11 students were the first cohort who completed their education from ages 11 to 16 at the school.

The school is an Investor in People organisation and has achieved the Silver Artsmark and Silver International School awards.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

The Blandford School provides a satisfactory standard of education. The care, guidance and support for students are good. The school is justifiably proud of its nurturing approach and the success of this can be seen in the good personal development for students across the school. They are polite, articulate and behave well. They say they enjoy life at the school, have good opportunities to participate and feel safe. This last point is strongly reinforced by parents and is a credit to the school given the extensive building work which has been under way on the large site since 2003. This has meant disruption for the whole school community but when completed will provide excellent accommodation. The cohort of students completing Key Stage 4 in 2010 were the first to be taught solely at the school from age 11. The current Year 11 had the most upheaval as they changed schools twice in two years due to reorganisation in the area. This has affected achievement. Attainment has declined from a high point in 2008 but concerted action has led to improvement to broadly average levels shown by the latest tracking data from the school, although this is stronger in English than mathematics. The progress students make over their time at the school, taking into account their starting points, also reflects this profile and the most recent data show that this is satisfactory for all groups and relatively stronger for lower ability students supported by specific programmes. This improvement is supported by evidence from lesson observations. The school's specialism in technology provides a satisfactory and improving range of opportunities for students and links with the community.

The headteacher displays a passionate commitment to the development of opportunities for students to achieve in all aspects of school life. Following the major changes at the school over the last few years, it is in a satisfactory position to accelerate improvement across all aspects of its work. This is due to the accurate self-evaluation and improvement planning which demonstrate a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and the development of more effective intervention strategies using tracking systems to target underperformance. However, although these systems are enhancing links with the monitoring of teaching and learning, this has not yet resulted in a sustained improvement in achievement. Governors are well led and fully committed to provide the most effective support for the improvement in attainment and progress seen in the school's most recent tracking data.. They understand the strengths and weaknesses in the school and are aware of the particular challenges the school has faced over the last few years.

The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall but variable across the school. There are some examples of very effective teaching but, in other lessons, though teachers identify learning objectives for students of different abilities in their planning, they do not always pursue these with rigour during the lesson. Currently, overall attendance is low but improving.

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A very large majority of parents and carers are happy with their children's experience at the school and feel that it is led and managed well. The school seeks the views of parents and carers through surveys and specific consultations. However, a small minority of parents and carers noted in the inspection questionnaire that the school could do more to help them support their children's learning.

Up to 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the attendance of students, particularly in Key Stage 4, to at least levels matching the national average for secondary schools.
- Raise attainment and improve rates of progress across the curriculum, especially in mathematics, by:
 - using assessment information and learning objectives to more effectively deliver lessons that take into account prior attainment and the learning needs of individuals and groups
 - developing further the current intervention strategies for students at risk of underachieving and regularly evaluating the effectiveness of these measures.
- Explore and resolve the issue noted in the parental survey as part of the inspection regarding the school's help for parents and carers to support learning.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**3**

Attainment outcomes fell in 2009 from an all time high the previous year but in 2010 began to rise and are on course for further improvement over the next two years. Senior and middle leaders are working hard on strategies to improve attainment, using an improved assessment tracking system to target underachievement and implement appropriate intervention strategies. As a result, the latest data show significant improvement in the predictions for the proportion of students expected to attain, for example, five good GCSEs including English and mathematics. Predictions for these latter subjects also show improvement, although this is less marked for mathematics.

Analysis of previous results shows variable progress for groups of students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. However, clear tracking of students' progress has led to more effective intervention for underachieving groups. The result of this is that the latest tracking data show accelerating progress for key groups, for example those supported by school action, compared with 2009/10. This picture of satisfactory progress by all groups, including girls and lower ability students, is reinforced by lesson observations.

Most students are keen to do well, respond thoughtfully to adults and other students in lessons and demonstrate good attitudes to learning and behaviour. However, where lessons lack specific challenge sharply focused on ability, the learning and progress are weaker. Discussions with students show that they understand the importance of a healthy lifestyle, how to keep safe and generally enjoy their lessons. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good. Overall attendance is low. However, systems now in place are robust in tracking trends in attendance and follow-up by pastoral staff is

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effective. As a result, the latest attendance figures since September for Years 7 and 8 are high, above average for Year 9 and showing a clear improvement for Year 10. Due to this rapid improvement in attendance, overall students' development of workplace skills is satisfactory. They have a secure understanding of how to use basic skills in a range of cross-curricular themes and have a clear idea about what they need to do to access the next stage of their education or the world of work.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	4
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

How effective is the provision?

There are some models of good, and outstanding, teaching in the school. Teaching in these lessons uses highly effective planning and focused questioning together with work in pairs or groups on practical tasks. Relationships with students are usually positive and, in good lessons, teachers use effective pace and challenging activities to ensure that students build on their previous learning in a systematic way. During the inspection there were some highly effective examples of teaching using grades or levels to explain what students need to do to improve but this was inconsistent across the school. In effective lessons, where activities are sharply differentiated to meet the needs of groups of students, the progress made was clear. However, overall, teachers do not use assessment information consistently to ensure progression in learning and this can slow the progress made by learners.

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The curriculum provides a satisfactory preparation for the next stage of students' lives, with some good elements. The school has been effective in developing an imaginative series of cross-curricular projects across the school. An example of this was the event called 'What does it mean to be British?', involving history, performing arts, geography and religious education, which also developed understanding of community cohesion and cultural development through links with a school in London. The school is reviewing the range of qualifications suitable for the needs of the whole cohort of students, including vocational provision to include work based learning. Extra-curricular opportunities are diverse and varied, with a high take-up by students. Clubs are tailored to meet needs, for example a computer club for girls. The impact of the school's specialism is satisfactory but improving. New leadership of the aspect is providing focus and vision and, as a result, improvements can be seen in subjects through intervention, for example electronics.

The students receive good care, guidance and support and these are strengths of the school. There is an effective system for care based on tutorial groups, with excellent relationships built up, as seen in the student logs. Heads of year are proactive in dealing with students who require extra support and guidance, although practice is not entirely consistent across the school in terms of evaluating the effectiveness of interventions. There is good analysis of data relating to behaviour and, as a result, the number of exclusions is falling. Focused work on improving attendance has resulted in significant improvement in the younger year groups. Vulnerable students are identified at an early stage and good quality advice and guidance enable them to make confident and well-informed choices. The work of the student support worker is particularly effective and appreciated by students.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher has a calm, determined approach and students, staff and parents speak positively about the support she provides. A praiseworthy feature of the leadership and management of the school is that for the extended period that the school has been subject to considerable building and refurbishment work, the students have continued to benefit from a developing range of learning opportunities. Senior staff have been, and continue to be, heavily involved in the design of the new accommodation. The outcome will be outstanding facilities, but it has been a demanding period for all staff, including leaders. Senior and middle leaders are knowledgeable, enthusiastic and committed to improvement. The school has an established cycle of faculty reviews; examination results are analysed systematically and underachievement by subjects is monitored and reviewed. Following lower than expected results in 2009, there has been an effective focus on

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raising attainment, particularly in English and mathematics. The impact of this work can be seen in the improved GCSE predictions in English but it has not yet led to consistently improved results overall. Governors are committed to improvement and are knowledgeable about the work of the school. They play an important part in the development and monitoring of the development plan. They evaluate their role annually and, as a result of their last review, they are currently developing links with faculties and a cycle of visits to support learning.

There have been good partnerships developed with other schools and the wider community, particularly for vocational options, for example the building construction course with tutors from a local college. The procedures to ensure the safeguarding of students are good. Policies, procedures and training are subject to regular review to ensure effective compliance with regulations. The school has good strategies to ensure it meets duties to promote equality and tackle discrimination. There are imaginative opportunities for students to contribute to the school and wider community. For example, there are effective links with an inner-city school in London and students contributed to a cross-curricular theme for Year 8 students. Email links have been established with schools on three continents and a more general link with a school in Ghana including teacher exchange. These activities help to develop students' good understanding of the religious, ethnic and socio-economic contexts of life both in the United Kingdom and abroad.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Sixth form

The school has a flexible policy for entry to the sixth form and provides a wide range of courses to meet the needs of students of all abilities, although most follow A- and AS-level courses in both academic and applied subjects. Overall, students make satisfactory progress from their starting points. In 2010, those on A2 courses in Year 13 made better

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progress than those on AS courses. Projections for 2011 indicate that progress for current students is accelerating; tracking indicates they are on target to achieve better than previous year groups. The current sixth form students did not have the opportunity to try out unfamiliar subjects through taster days before they made their course choices. Plans are in place for this process to be reviewed for future cohorts in order to help retention rates from Year 12 to 13 although they are currently satisfactory. At the beginning of Year 12, some students do not have the skills to work independently and this slows the rate at which they initially make progress. Measures are in place to support this through the tutorial programme.

Students describe some inspiring and exciting lessons, where they make exceptional progress. In these lessons, they are actively involved in their learning and are helped to develop good independent study skills. High quality feedback, through both marking and discussions with their teachers, means that they know exactly what they need to do in order to be successful. However, this is not always the case, and the quality of teaching is variable. In some lessons, teachers talk for too long, and students do not have an opportunity to discuss what they are doing. Some teaching groups are very small and students lack the opportunity to work with their peers although they appreciate the fact that their subject choices are protected to their conclusion. Students describe many teachers and support staff who 'go the extra mile' to provide guidance and support, both with academic and personal issues, including comprehensive help with applications to higher and further education. A wide-ranging programme of personal education is provided and students particularly appreciate the input from outside speakers. Students are actively encouraged to extend their range of experience through sport or involvement with arts activities. Many make a positive contribution to the school and local community, for example by peer mentoring or helping in primary schools.

Planning by the sixth form leaders is rightly focused on raising achievement and improving the quality of provision. Students' progress is tracked regularly and systems for monitoring and providing support for those who are underachieving are developing well. Systems are in place to monitor and challenge those students who do not attend regularly, but the enforcement of signing-out procedures so that the school knows exactly who is on site is not always rigorous.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	3
The quality of provision in the sixth form	3
Leadership and management of the sixth form	3

Views of parents and carers

A very large majority of parents and carers are happy with their children's experience at the school. Responses show that they feel strongly that their children enjoy school, are safe and cared for, well informed about the progress made by their children and happy

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with the standard of teaching. Most parents and carers also feel that the leadership and management of the school are effective. A small minority felt that the school could do more to help them support their children's learning and was less effective in helping children to have a healthy lifestyle. Furthermore, a very small minority felt that the school should take more account of parental suggestions and concerns and deal more effectively with unacceptable behaviour. The school provided evidence from parents and carers' surveys that showed more positive responses than the inspection survey, although the wording of questions was different. The inspection team found that the school was effective in providing opportunities for sporting activities and options for healthy eating. There are a range of opportunities for parents and carers to communicate with the school and get information to support learning but sometimes this is out-of-date; at the time of the inspection, for example, the website displayed GCSE revision guidance from 2008/09 on the parent pages. During this inspection, students' behaviour and attitude to learning were both good.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of students registered at The Blandford School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school. In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 141 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1106 students registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	30	21	89	63	13	9	6	4
The school keeps my child safe	31	22	103	73	6	4	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	53	38	79	56	7	5	1	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	36	26	81	57	17	12	4	3
The teaching is good at this school	20	14	102	72	14	10	1	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	19	13	82	58	34	24	2	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	17	12	86	61	28	20	4	3
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	34	24	82	58	11	8	4	3
The school meets my child's particular needs	23	16	92	65	15	11	4	3
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	31	22	76	54	16	11	7	5
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	23	16	81	57	20	14	4	3
The school is led and managed effectively	35	25	86	61	12	9	2	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	43	30	77	55	16	11	3	2

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



24 March 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of The Blandford School, Blandford Forum DT11 7SQ

Thank you for making the inspection team so welcome when we inspected your school recently. Special thanks go to the student guides who helped the inspectors find their way around and to those of you who completed the questionnaire; we found this very useful. We enjoyed talking with all the students we met and found what you had to say very informative and relevant.

This letter is to tell you about our findings. The Blandford School provides a satisfactory standard of education. We were impressed by your good behaviour and your awareness of the need to move around the school sensibly, due to the extensive building work on site. Your attainment at the end of Year 11 shows improvement following a fall in 2009. The progress you make across the school is satisfactory and improving but needs to be greater, particularly in mathematics. The opportunities you have through the specialist subject of technology are improving. You are cared for and supported well. Your attendance is low overall, but improving. Teaching is generally satisfactory, with a significant proportion that is good and better. The staff provide you with a developing curriculum that increasingly meets your interests and needs.

The senior leaders and staff have worked very hard to support students during an extended period of reorganisation and building work. The headteacher, senior staff and governors provide clear leadership and management. They recognise that there are aspects of the school that need improvement, and these are the areas the inspection team identified.

- Improve attendance, particularly by Key Stage 4 students.
- Increase achievement across the curriculum further, especially in mathematics, by ensuring that assessment information and learning objectives are used effectively by teachers to plan lessons which will challenge students and improve their progress in learning.
- Consider the ways that the school helps parents and carers to support learning at home.

You too have a very important part to play by attending regularly. This is vitally important because if you do not attend school, you cannot learn. You should also continue to work hard and make the most of the range of opportunities you have at school. I am sure that you will, and wish you well for the future.

Yours sincerely

Robert Pyner

Her Majesty's Inspector

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