

The Blue School

Kennion Road, Wells, BA5 2NR

Inspection dates 23–24 october 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
	This inspection:	Good 2
Achievement of pupils	Good	2
Quality of teaching	Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Good	2
Leadership and management	Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Students make good and often very good progress. The proportion of students gaining five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, has increased and exceeds the national average.
- Teaching is good and some is outstanding. Lessons are well planned and many include a rich variety of activities.
- The school's senior leaders, well supported by governors, have been successful in raising achievement and improving the quality of teaching. They are taking strong actions to bring about further improvements.
- The sixth form is good. Its students make good progress, reach high standards of attainment and have many opportunities to make positive contributions to school life.
- Students are proud of their school. They show respect to one another and to adults. They feel safe and their behaviour is good both in lessons and around the school.
- Governors are effective and show a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strong so that they are well prepared to be considerate citizens.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- All groups of students do not make equally rapid progress. Although the progress of students known to be eligible for free school meals is increasing, it is not yet equal to that of other students.
- Attendance is below the national average for secondary schools.
- There is not enough outstanding teaching.
- Some teachers with leadership roles are not making enough impact on raising achievement.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed parts of 51 lessons, of which 11 were jointly observed with a member of the school's leadership team. Inspectors visited an assembly, tutor groups and other learning activities.
- Inspectors held meetings with three groups of students, talked with students around the school and scrutinised samples of students' work.
- Meetings were held with senior leaders, other staff with leadership responsibilities and two members of the governing body. A discussion was held with a representative of the local authority.
- A variety of school documentation was examined, including the school's records of current students' progress, examination results for 2013, self-evaluation summaries and improvement plans, behaviour and attendance logs, records relating to safeguarding and those relating to the management of staff performance.
- Inspectors took account of the questionnaire completed by 113 staff, together with 241 responses submitted to the online questionnaire Parent View and one letter from a parent.

Inspection team

Sean Thornton, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
David Howe	Additional Inspector
Anne Looney	Additional Inspector
Joanna Pike	Additional Inspector
Jackie Jones	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is much larger than the average-sized secondary school and has a large sixth form.
- A lower than average proportion of students are eligible for the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for children in local authority care, students from service families and those known to be entitled for free school meals. Almost all of these students in this school are those known to be eligible for free school meals.
- Most students are from White British backgrounds and the proportion of students whose first language is not English is much below the national average.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is average. The proportion of these students supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is below average.
- There are a few students eligible for the Years 7 and 8 catch-up funding, which is for students who did not achieve the expected level at the end of Key Stage 2.
- A small number of students attend alternative provision at Norton Radstock College to follow work-related courses.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress by the end of Year 11.
- The Blue School converted to become an academy in August 2011. When its predecessor school, also called The Blue School, was last inspected in May 2010, it was judged to be good.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the amount of outstanding teaching by:
 - making sure that all teachers give high quality feedback to students, enabling them to understand how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve, and providing them with time to respond
 - ensuring that the good practice present in the school, relating to pace, challenge and independent learning, is shared among all teachers
 - developing coherent approaches to the development of literacy and numeracy across the curriculum.
- Improve the rate of attendance so that it is comparable or better than the national average.
- Ensure that all middle leaders receive the training and support needed to enable them to be fully effective in bringing about school improvement.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students join the school with attainment that is above the national average. The proportion that gain five or more GCSE grades A* to C at the end of Year 11 is above average, as are many other attainment measures.
- Students make good progress from their starting points in almost all their subjects. In mathematics their progress is outstanding and in 2013 progress in English is also strong. The progress of boys in core subjects is equal to that of girls.
- The school identified that in 2012 different groups of students were making different rates of progress, for example in English less-able students were not making as much progress as the more-able. By focusing their efforts on these issues the differences have been much reduced.
- Recent improvements have been made to the school's tracking systems so that they now focus clearly on the progress of all groups of students towards their targets. This is contributing to the increase in achievement.
- Students in the sixth form reach high levels of attainment, including average points scores that are well above average. Their progress from their starting points across all subjects is good and the school is committed to further accelerating this progress.
- Disabled students and those with special educational needs are well provided for in lessons. Until recently, the progress made by some students supported at school action and school action plus has been slower than others. By paying greater attention to the specific needs of these students, the school is ensuring that more of them are now making progress in line with their peers.
- The school makes good use of the pupil premium funding. Eligible students benefit from small-group teaching in English and mathematics, one-to-one tutorial support and from financial support that enables them to participate fully in school activities such as design and technology work and enrichments. In 2012 the rates of progress of these students in English and mathematics were less than those of their peers but well above those of similar students nationally. Their attainment in English was one grade less than that of other students in the school and in mathematics the difference was two grades. In 2013 their progress has increased and the school's tracking shows that the rate of this improvement is increasing lower down the school so that the gap in attainment is reducing.
- The Year 7 catch-up premium is being used to provide one-to-one teaching in English and mathematics as well as extra small groups. The entitled students are now catching up with their peers.
- Early entry for GCSE has been used only for small groups of students when the school was sure they would benefit. In 2013, 18 students were entered for their mathematics examinations at the end of Year 10. All gained GCSE grade A*.
- The school is committed to ensuring equal opportunities for all its students.
- The small number of students who attend Norton Radstock College for part of their week make good progress in the courses they are following.

The quality of teaching is good

- Most teaching is good and some is outstanding. However, teaching is not outstanding overall because not enough is outstanding.
- The headteacher has taken rigorous actions to improve teaching. Many new roles have been created in the school's leadership teams, all with a focus on teaching and learning, and these measures are leading to improving achievement.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge. They set high expectations and show enthusiasm for their subjects, and students respond well to the tasks provided for them, extending their

knowledge and deepening their understanding.

- The learning that students develop in the classroom is extended by well-designed homework.
- In the best lessons, teachers ensured that work was provided at the right levels for all students, gave them many opportunities for working independently and maintained a good pace. For example, in an outstanding art lesson, students were provided with individual advice to improve their own work, developed it rapidly and then assessed each other's work against clear criteria, resulting in outstanding progress.
- In some less effective lessons teachers provide too much explanation themselves rather than allowing students to be independent or think for themselves which limits the opportunities for students to make outstanding progress. In other lessons not enough attention is given to providing work at an appropriate level for all students; in particular, not enough support is given to less-able members of the class so that they do not make as rapid progress.
- Teaching in the sixth form aims at developing students as independent learners and in many lessons this is successful. In an outstanding chemistry lesson, students worked in small groups on very challenging extended investigations, assessing their progress against clear criteria. They showed sustained commitment and concentration, resulting in excellent progress.
- The teaching of English and mathematics in their subject lessons is good so that students develop the basic skills they need for the future. However, the teaching of these skills is not cohesively planned or taught across the curriculum so that students do not make some important connections in their learning.
- Some teachers mark students' work regularly and in detail, encouraging students to take responsibility by involving them in assessment and giving them clear advice on how to improve. However, this good practice is not consistent and in many classes marking is brief, lacks detail and does not involve students in the ongoing assessment and improvement process. Students reported that they would welcome a common system of marking so that it did not vary between subjects.
- Almost all parents and carers who expressed a view were confident that their children were benefiting from good teaching.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Students' behaviour is typically good and often better. In almost all lessons they concentrate well, showing positive attitudes and a desire to learn. They respect their teachers, appreciate the opportunities offered to them and show pride in their school.
- Students are punctual for their lessons, moving purposefully between the different parts of this very large school site.
- Teachers are skilled in managing students' behaviour and students know that they have high expectations. On the rare occasions that there is disruption in lessons it is dealt with effectively.
- Students show consideration towards each other. They report that incidents of bullying, including cyber-bullying, are rare and are dealt with swiftly.
- Students feel safe in school and the curriculum supports them well in learning how to stay safe. They have a good understanding of e-safety, including how to avoid unsafe websites.
- The number of fixed-term exclusions is lower than average.
- The school's behaviour logs are well kept. They show that the school has clear procedures in place, including the use of internal exclusions, to address issues of misbehaviour and that extra interventions are put in place when needed.
- Students whose circumstances make them more vulnerable, disabled students and those who have special educational needs are well supported by staff and by other students.
- Attendance is below average and this weakness limits the school's potential for students' behaviour and safety to become outstanding. Improved strategies have now been put in place and there are early signs that attendance is improving.
- Sixth form students display mature good manners and are good role models for younger students.

- The school checks that students attending off-site provision attend regularly and that there are no concerns with their welfare.
- Almost all parents and carers who expressed a view considered that behaviour is managed well. They also said that their child is happy at the school and feels safe.

The leadership and management are good

- The school's senior leaders set high expectations of staff and students. They have taken effective actions to raise students' achievement and standards of teaching. The headteacher's commitment to further raise standards is shared by staff and governors.
 - The school's evaluation of its strengths and areas for improvement is rigorous and accurate, and leads to a good school improvement plan that has measurable outcomes and an evaluation of actions that the school has taken.
 - The effectiveness of staff with middle leadership responsibilities is variable. Some are less involved in monitoring and some do not develop detailed improvement strategies.
 - The management of teaching and its impact on learning is good. Joint observations during the inspection showed that the school's judgements on the quality of teaching are accurate. Actions taken to improve teaching have been successful.
 - The results of departmental evaluations are now being used to provide a range of professional development which responds to the needs of the staff. Sharing good practice is developing and school leaders are focused on supporting staff to become outstanding practitioners.
 - The leadership of the sixth form is good. Weaker areas have been identified and steps are being taken to address them, including making changes to the curriculum. Students receive good guidance on their courses and this is reducing the number of students who leave AS courses before they are completed. The proportion of students who progress from Year 12 to Year 13 is above average. Students benefit from further good guidance on their destinations and many go on to valuable university courses.
 - The system of performance management is well organised and is being updated to fully relate to the National Teachers' Standards. There is evidence that salary progression is taken seriously and that it occurs only when merited by sustained good performance.
 - The curriculum is highly personalised and is constantly being evaluated and refined to ensure a suitable range of courses, fully meeting the needs of all students, so they make increasingly strong progress. Students also have good opportunities to engage in a range of activities outside the normal school day.
 - Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is central to the life of the school. Provision is good, both in the curriculum and in the wider life of the school. It is fostered by visits and by the wide variety of opportunities in music, art, sports, drama and effective school assemblies. The well-established school council enables students to make meaningful contributions to their school community. A particularly strong feature is the impact of the school chaplain who emphasises the importance of spiritual development across the curriculum and is available to students and staff when they require support.
 - All aspects of safeguarding are fully met. The governing body and senior leaders realise that this complex site presents particular challenges and have procedures in place to keep all students safe.
 - The school has zero tolerance of discrimination. Promoting good relationships and making sure that everyone has the same chance to succeed are at the heart of the school's values.
 - The school continues to work in close partnership with the local authority which has supported the school effectively in its plans to raise achievement. The school and the local authority co-operate in local learning groups and senior staff of the school have contributed to local authority initiatives.
- **The governance of the school:**
- Governors have effective committee structures in place for undertaking their statutory

responsibilities. They make sure that all safeguarding responsibilities are met and that all appropriate policies are in place. Governors manage the school's finances well, including the additional funding for the pupil premium. They can speak confidently about the quality of teaching in different parts of the school and what is being done to improve it. They show an understanding of whole-school student performance information and can describe measures that are being taken to improve the progress of students known to be eligible for free school meals. Minutes of meetings confirm that governors provide challenge to the headteacher and other school leaders. Governors are fully involved in the performance management system for teaching staff; all promotions, with their financial consequences, are discussed in governor committees. They know what the school is doing to reward good teaching and to tackle any underperformance.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	137285
Local authority	Somerset
Inspection number	424616

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

Type of school	Academy converter
School category	Non-maintained
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	1570
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	284
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Elizabeth Walker
Headteacher	Stephen Jackson
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01749 678799
Fax number	01749 836215
Email address	office@blue.somerset.gov.uk

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