

The Blue School

Kennion Road, Wells, Somerset BA5 2NR

Inspection dates

17–18 October 2017

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Pupils benefit from a rich experience throughout their time in school. They are known and cared for as individuals. There are many opportunities for them to excel. As a result, they flourish.
- There is good teaching across a broad range of subjects. Consequently, pupils make good progress.
- Standards of attainment are high. In 2017, three quarters of pupils achieved a standard pass in both English and mathematics. Over half achieved a good pass. This is above the national average.
- School leaders are determined to ensure that the curriculum remains broad and meets the needs of all pupils. There is particularly good provision in technology and the arts.
- The sixth form is a strength of the school. Students are enthusiastic about the range of courses available and the quality of their experience. Overall, they make good progress.
- The newly appointed headteacher has quickly grasped the character and strengths of the school and the areas which need to be developed. The senior team is working effectively, building on the traditional strengths of the school and tackling pockets of weaker performance.
- Pupils behave well. They are polite and courteous to adults. They are good humoured and friendly with each other. Bullying is not common and, when it does occur, it is dealt with well.
- The culture of safeguarding is very strong across all parts of the school. Pupils and parents feel that school leaders and teachers ensure that the school environment is safe. Support for vulnerable pupils is very good.
- Pupils are set challenging targets and are keen to achieve them. However, in some subjects, they are not given clear advice on how to improve their work. This slows them down.
- Disadvantaged pupils have not made good progress in the past. Those pupils currently in the school are doing significantly better as a result of the additional support they are receiving. School leaders know that an in-depth analysis of what has been effective will help make further improvements.
- Middle leaders are improving teaching in their subject areas. As a result, the progress that pupils are making in key stages 3 and 4 is also improving. However, some of these initiatives are relatively new and are not yet embedded across all subjects.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that recent improvements to the quality of teaching are embedded across all subject areas and all key stages
 - making sure that the use of pupil premium funding is analysed and used as effectively as possible to raise disadvantaged pupils' achievement further.
- Improve teaching, learning and assessment by developing assessment procedures that ensure pupils know how to improve their work and so reach the highest possible standards.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Governors and senior leaders are ambitious for the success of the school and for its pupils. They are committed to serving the needs of the community and to ensuring that the school plays a role in the community. They are keen to ensure that pupils are given a broad education that includes achievement and experience beyond examination success.
- The headteacher is new in post. In the short time he has had, he has accurately diagnosed the school's strengths and weaknesses and is setting about giving further impetus to the improvements in teaching and learning that had been made in the previous year.
- The senior team are focused on further improving the school without losing its character. They have had a good impact on improving attendance and on reducing pockets of weaker teaching that exist within the school. They are self-critical and know there is more to do.
- Subject leaders have responded positively to the challenge senior leaders set to improve teaching, learning and assessment in their areas. In English, for example, the quality of teaching has improved significantly. In science too, leaders are acting to raise the quality of teaching. As a result, pupils are now making markedly better progress than was the case in previous years.
- School leaders' work to eliminate weak teaching is increasingly successful. The new headteacher is building on previous work to tackle underperformance. Where performance is unsatisfactory, plans are put in place, performance monitored and improvements expected.
- Leaders are successful in improving the quality of teaching because teachers are given opportunities to update and improve their skills. Leaders are aware that some of these training opportunities have been insufficiently focused on key school priorities in the past. Teachers say this has improved and their professional development is now closely aligned with key school initiatives.
- The curriculum is carefully designed to meet the needs of all pupils. School leaders and governors are keen to ensure that pupils choose key stage 4 courses that suit them and meet their hopes for the future. They ensure that there is a good range of high-quality opportunities across all subjects, particularly in technology and the arts. They also provide pupils with good careers education and independent advice to help them make their choices. One result of this process is that a lower than average number of pupils choose subjects that meet the criteria for the EBacc suite of subjects. However, pupils are not disadvantaged by this. The school tracks the destinations of pupils as they move on to the sixth form or college. This information shows clearly that pupils are successful in pursuing their ambitions. Hardly any fail to pursue the next stage of their education or training successfully.
- Leaders have ensured that there is a rich diet of extra-curricular activities for pupils. There is a broad range of sports teams, arts groups and other clubs. Pupils greatly value these and attendance is very high.

- Leaders ensure that pupils understand the importance of fundamental British values. These values are explicitly taught in lessons and via assemblies. However, it is the open and tolerant culture within the school that successfully deepens and embeds these values.
- Leaders are ensuring that pupil premium funding supports disadvantaged pupils effectively. As a result of the school's detailed plans, attendance has risen and pupils are making significantly more progress. However, school leaders are aware that they are not clear about which parts of the plan have been responsible for these improvements and so cannot target their efforts as effectively as they otherwise could.
- Leaders make good use of the funding available to support Year 7 pupils who need to catch up. Programmes to improve their reading are effective in allowing these pupils to make better progress across the curriculum.
- Leaders ensure that pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are well supported. Pupils' progress is analysed regularly and interventions made as a result. The funding the school receives to support pupils with education, health and care plans is used effectively to enable these pupils to make progress.
- School leaders are keen to work in networks with other local schools and external consultants to improve their practice. There has been some effective supporting work in science and with boys' writing. Standards are improving as a result.

Governance of the school

- Governors have a clear and ambitious vision for the school. They are very proud of it and know it well through their visits and through the information leaders provide. They are focused on improving standards across the school, for all pupils. They are also determined to maintain and further develop the school's historical strengths of care and support for every pupil and to celebrate the wider aspects of school life.
- Governors are holding leaders to account with increasing robustness. They have worked well with leaders over many aspects of school life over a long period and have steered the school through difficult financial decisions. They have now brought that same level of thoughtfulness to challenge leaders over the standards that pupils achieve.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders ensure that a strong culture of safeguarding permeates the school. The values of support and care are evident across the school. Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe online and in the real world. They know who to go to if they have a concern. School staff work well with external agencies and parents to support vulnerable pupils.
- All the necessary systems are in place to protect pupils. The appropriate checks are made on all those who work with children. All staff are trained and understand what to do should a pupil disclose an incident to them. There is a robust risk assessment in place regarding the public footpath that crosses the school site.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers are subject specialists who know their subjects well. They typically have high expectations of what pupils can achieve. This combination leads to well-focused teaching that highlights key learning points for pupils. Pupils are keen to succeed and they respond readily. They want to answer questions and to take part in lessons.
- Teaching is very effective in technology and the arts, in particular. In these subjects, pupils are eager and enthusiastic. Teachers ensure that the tasks they set stimulate pupils' thinking. These lessons are also underpinned by positive relationships. The result is that pupils make strong progress.
- Teaching in English is good. Pupils are making good progress as a result of teachers' high expectations and a clear focus on the development of key skills. Pupils in key stage 3 are challenged appropriately. They enjoy being stretched and rise to the challenge. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are well supported in English. This allows them to contribute well and to improve their literacy skills.
- Overall, pupils are also making appropriate progress in mathematics. High-ability pupils are reaching good standards. For example, they are confident in tackling complex questions of algebra and geometry. However, lower-ability pupils are sometimes set work which focuses on practising numeracy skills without making them think about solving problems in real-world contexts. This restricts their progress.
- The quality of teaching in science is improving significantly. In previous years, results have been too low but teachers are now setting more demanding work. Pupils are responding and rising to the challenge and so making better progress.
- Teachers are working hard to address the additional needs of disadvantaged pupils by ensuring that they are actively involved in lessons and are well supported. This is paying dividends. These pupils are now making better progress than they have done in the past.
- There is still some teaching which does not promote good progress. Typically, weaker teaching is incorrectly pitched, so that it does not stretch the most able pupils, who are coasting, or support pupils who need a little extra help to make progress.
- Systems for assessing what pupils know in each subject and the progress they are making are being overhauled to meet the demands of a changing curriculum. However, the current arrangements are still effective in setting targets for pupils and tracking how well they are meeting them. Teachers are less effective in helping pupils to understand how to improve their work. There are subjects, for example in English, where teachers are good at explaining this to pupils and so moving them forward, but this is not sufficiently widespread to be totally successful. As a result of this inconsistency, pupils are not in the habit of responding to teachers' feedback and so the opportunity is lost.

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. It is a significant strength of the school.
- Pupils work and play together well. They are generally self-aware and self-assured and they are confident when expressing themselves. Pupils say that the school community is very a tolerant and respectful one and everyone is welcome in their school, regardless of sexuality, faith or race.
- School leaders and staff work hard to promote mental health. Pupils have the opportunity to learn about mindfulness and discuss making the right choices as they grow up. There are good systems in place to protect vulnerable pupils. These are underpinned by positive relationships between staff and pupils. Pupils and parents are appreciative of the support pupils receive.
- Pupils feel safe in school and are well equipped with skills through their personal, social and health education lessons to keep themselves safe beyond the school gates. They also understand the dangers that exist in the virtual world.
- Pupils are engaged in many activities that develop their spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding. This term, for example, Year 7 pupils are working together on a 'this is our school' project, where they can explore how they can share ideas, compromise and reach consensus. There are numerous other opportunities presented to pupils, via whole-day events and lessons, to think about the complexity of the modern world and their place in it. For example, all pupils have the opportunity to become involved in local, national and international charity fund-raising.
- Leaders and staff give the idea of serving the community prominence in a number of ways across the school. Sixth-form students, for example, take on mentoring roles with younger pupils. Both groups enjoy and benefit from this work.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- There is a calm and orderly atmosphere across the school. Pupils move around the large site purposefully between lessons. They are well behaved at breaktimes and lunchtimes and they enter and leave the site sensibly. There is an atmosphere of good humour across the school at these busy times.
- There is little disruption in lessons. The vast majority of pupils do what is asked of them quickly and without fuss. They are generally keen to learn. They answer questions readily and volunteer for activities whenever they can. On occasion, when the quality of teaching dips and it fails to engage pupils, some drift off task but they remain polite and compliant.
- Bullying is uncommon and pupils and parents agree that it is dealt with well.
- School leaders and staff have worked hard over the last few years to improve attendance and reduce the number who are persistently absent. They are making

progress and attendance is now broadly in line with the national average. There has been a significant decrease in the number of disadvantaged pupils who are persistently absent.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Overall, in recent years, pupils have made progress in line with that in other schools. This is equally true for the most able and for middle-ability pupils. Historically, lower-ability pupils did not do as well. This has improved recently. Lower-ability pupils now achieve in line with the national average.
- The national measure of pupils' progress is calculated across a range of subjects. In some cases, because of the school's approach to GCSE options, pupils have not taken the combination of subjects required to maximise that measure. Governors and school leaders have allowed this to happen because they believe it is in the best interests of the pupils. The result is that the published national measure slightly understates the progress pupils are making.
- Pupils' levels of attainment are higher than the national averages. In 2017, more than seven out of ten pupils achieved a standard pass in GCSE English and mathematics (previously grades A*–C) and more than half achieved a good pass. These figures are well above the national averages. There is a similar pattern across a wide range of other subjects.
- Pupils currently in the school are achieving well. There have been significant improvements to the quality of teaching in English and science, among others. This is leading to better progress in these subjects.
- Girls achieve more and make better progress than boys. Boys have historically made slower progress than boys in other schools. Boys currently in school are making significantly better progress as a result of changes to the curriculum and improvements to teaching and learning.
- Disadvantaged pupils have not made progress in line with other pupils in the past. As a result of the work on attendance and the additional support they are now receiving, they are now making better progress. Disadvantaged pupils in key stage 3 are making progress in line with that of other pupils.
- Pupils make progress in line with that of pupils in other schools in English, mathematics and science. They make significantly better progress in the arts and in technology.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities generally make good progress. They are well supported in English and, as a result, they make good progress with their literacy skills. This helps them to access other parts of the curriculum.
- The most able make good progress across a range of subjects. Expectations are high and they respond positively to those expectations. They work hard and are keen to succeed.
- The standard of literacy is high. Pupils read and write well. They get regular opportunities to practise writing extended passages. This helps them to express themselves and explain their thinking, particularly in subjects such as English and history.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- Students in the sixth form make good progress and reach high standards across a broad range of subjects. This is because they are well taught by subject specialists. As a result, students are enthusiastic and engaged learners. Students make good progress on applied and technical courses as well as on A-level courses.
- In 2017, students' results improved significantly. Prior to that, results had been broadly in line with national averages. In 2017, disadvantaged students achieved similar results to other students. This is an improvement on previous years, when they fell short.
- Students value the support they receive from staff throughout their time in the sixth form. Their progress is closely monitored and teachers intervene to mentor them should they fall behind. Leaders are committed to ensuring that every student completes their studies and none are left to fail or drop out.
- Success rates are high because staff take great care to ensure that students embark on appropriate courses that match their strengths and their career aspirations. As a result of this work, the vast majority of students complete their courses successfully and go on to university or on to higher-level apprenticeships.
- Students who need to retake their English or mathematics GCSEs alongside their other studies make good progress and success rates are higher than the national averages.
- Students benefit from a broad range of good-quality work experience placements as part of their programme of study. They also enjoy the richness of additional opportunities open to them, including volunteering to support younger pupils and work in the community. Students are proud of the sixth form and feel they gain a great deal from being a part of it.
- There are good systems in place to keep students safe. They benefit from the culture of care and support that pervades the whole school.

School details

Unique reference number	137285
Local authority	Somerset
Inspection number	10037054

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,641
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	327
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Liz Walker
Headteacher	Mark Woodlock
Telephone number	01749 678799
Website	www.theblueschoolwells.co.uk/
Email address	office@blue.somerset.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	October 2013

Information about this school

- The school is larger than the average-sized secondary school.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress by the end of Year 11.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is average. The number supported by an education, health and care plan is well below average.
- The proportion of pupils supported by pupil premium funding is below average.

- Nine out of 10 pupils are of White British heritage. There are few from minority ethnic groups and very few speak English as an additional language.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school complies with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning across a wide range of subjects and age groups, and scrutinised a wide range of pupils' written work. Some of the observations were conducted jointly with senior leaders.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documentation, including minutes of governors' meetings, development plans, analysis of pupils' progress, attendance and behaviour logs, safeguarding documents and the school's review of its own performance.
- Meetings were held with governors, the headteacher, senior and middle leaders, and groups of pupils in key stage 3, key stage 4 and in the sixth form.
- Inspectors took account of 45 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, and the responses to the school's own parent survey, and they also spoke with parents. They also took into consideration 64 responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Andrew Lovett, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Benjamin Houghton	Ofsted Inspector
Shelagh Pritchard	Ofsted Inspector
Richard Butler	Ofsted Inspector
Malcolm Davison	Ofsted Inspector
Judith Mee	Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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