

Inspection of Blacon High School, A Specialist Sports College

Melbourne Road, Blacon, Chester, Cheshire CH1 5JH

Inspection dates: 19 and 20 October 2021

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Previous inspection grade

Good

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils said that they are happy at Blacon High School. They told inspectors that they feel cared for and well supported by staff. Pupils enjoy learning in a calm and friendly environment.

Staff have high expectations of pupils' behaviour. Pupils understand how to behave towards each other. They model the school's 'core principles', which include having tolerance and respect for others. Pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. They are motivated by the rewards that they can achieve. Staff manage any incidents of poor behaviour well.

Pupils are proud of their work. They know that their teachers will help them with their learning. Leaders and teachers want pupils to do well. However, leaders have not ensured that all pupils receive a suitably ambitious, well-planned curriculum. As a result, some pupils do not achieve as well as they should.

Pupils benefit from a wide range of clubs and activities. They welcome the extensive opportunities that they get through the personal development curriculum to develop their character and resilience, as well as their leadership skills.

Pupils feel safe at school. Most pupils do not perceive bullying to be a problem. They are confident that staff will take any incidents of bullying seriously and deal quickly with any problems that may arise.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders and governors have an overly optimistic view of the quality of education that they provide. They want pupils to progress well through the curriculum and to go on to appropriate destinations. However, their vision has not been fully realised. The curriculum lacks ambition. For example, in key stage 4, the number of pupils who follow the English Baccalaureate suite of subjects is very low.

Leaders have recently taken some effective action to broaden the curriculum in some subjects in key stage 3. Subjects such as history and geography now align more fully with the national curriculum. However, in other subjects, the curriculum that pupils study remains unnecessarily curtailed. In these subjects, pupils do not develop the rich and detailed knowledge that they need to be sufficiently well prepared for the next stage of their education.

Where subject leaders have been successful in developing the curriculum, they have thought carefully about the content that pupils need to learn. In these subjects, leaders' plans are carefully organised so that pupils build up their knowledge over time. As a result, pupils progress well through the curriculum. However, other subjects remain underdeveloped. This is because leaders have not identified the knowledge and vocabulary that pupils need to complete complex tasks.

Consequently, some pupils do not build up sufficient subject-specific knowledge. Although senior leaders have identified this issue, they have not finalised their plans to address these deficits.

Teachers have secure subject knowledge at Blacon High School. They are keen to share this knowledge with pupils. That said, a less-than-ambitious curriculum, coupled with some weaker use of assessment, hinders pupils' achievement. Some teachers do not make sufficient checks on what pupils know and can remember of the curriculum. They do not respond quickly enough when pupils have forgotten their learning.

Leaders have recently introduced a school-wide programme to improve all pupils' reading skills. In addition, staff give younger pupils individual support to help them to catch-up quickly with their reading. However, some older pupils still have gaps in their reading knowledge. This is hindering how well these pupils progress through the wider curriculum.

Leaders accurately identify pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Staff ensure that pupils with SEND get the help that they need. However, like their peers, the achievement of pupils with SEND is affected by weaker curriculum planning.

Leaders expect pupils to behave well and treat others respectfully. They have fostered a positive environment where pupils can learn without disruption.

Leaders intend the curriculum to develop a pupil's mind, body and character. Pupils enjoy learning about equality and diversity, social responsibility and British values. Leaders ensure that the careers programme meets pupils' needs.

Staff enjoy working in this school. Leaders are considerate of staff's workload and well-being.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders are committed to looking after pupils' welfare. They ensure that staff are knowledgeable about the risks that pupils face. Staff are aware of their responsibilities to report concerns about pupils in line with school policies and procedures. They use the reporting systems well.

The safeguarding team works closely with pastoral staff to safeguard pupils. Staff liaise effectively with external agencies to ensure that pupils and their families get the timely support that they need.

Leaders ensure that pupils are taught about how to keep themselves safe, including when online. Pupils learn how to have healthy relationships.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders' and governors' vision for the school's curriculum is not finalised. This means that in some subjects the curriculum is not suitably ambitious for all pupils. As a result, pupils do not always develop the rich and detailed knowledge that they need to prepare them for the next stage of their education. Leaders should review the curriculum to ensure that it is suitably broad and ambitious for all pupils in all subjects.
- In planning their curriculums, subject leaders have not always identified the important knowledge that pupils need to learn. This means that pupils' learning across the curriculum is uneven. Leaders need to ensure that all subject leaders have clearly identified the precise knowledge that pupils need to know and remember.
- Some leaders and teachers do not use assessment effectively to check how well pupils are learning the intended curriculum. As a result, some teachers are not aware of the knowledge that pupils have forgotten or not fully grasped. Leaders should ensure that teachers understand how to use assessment to check how well pupils have learned the intended content.
- Until recently, leaders have not taken appropriate action to support older pupils who are behind with their reading knowledge. As a result, some pupils in key stage 4 do not access the curriculum as well as they should. Leaders should fully roll out and embed their plans to support pupils who have difficulty reading, so that they can catch-up quickly.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	111396
Local authority	Cheshire West and Chester
Inspection number	10199604
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Foundation Trust
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	684
Appropriate authority	Local authority
Chair of governing body	Peter Wilks
Headteacher	Rachel Hudson
Website	www.blaconhighschool.net
Dates of previous inspection	26 and 27 January 2016, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Since the last inspection, the number of pupils on the school's roll has increased from 395 to 684.
- A small number of pupils are educated through two alternative providers.
- The school meets the requirements of the Baker Clause. This means that pupils in Years 8 to 11 receive information about the full range of education and training options open to them. This includes opportunities for a range of education and training providers to speak to pupils about technical educational qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this inspection under section 5 of the Education Act.

This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with school leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- During the inspection, inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, other senior leaders, including the designated safeguarding lead, the special educational needs coordinator, middle leaders, teachers and members of support staff.
- The lead inspector met with members of the governing body of the school, including the chair of governors.
- The lead inspector also spoke with the local authority school improvement officer and the school improvement partner.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in the following subjects: English, history, modern foreign languages, science and technology. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers, spoke with some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also looked at curriculum plans and spoke to leaders about some other subjects. They visited a sample of lessons in a range of subjects.
- Inspectors met with those responsible for safeguarding. They reviewed a range of documentation in relation to safeguarding, including the school's pre-employment checks on staff. They spoke to staff and pupils about wider aspects of safeguarding. They also considered survey responses from staff, parents and carers around safeguarding.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour during breaktimes, lunchtimes, in corridors and during lessons. They also spoke to pupils about bullying, behaviour and leaders' expectations of their behaviour. Inspectors also discussed pupils' programme of wider personal development.
- Inspectors considered the responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. This included the comments submitted via the free-text facility. Inspectors also reviewed the responses to Ofsted's staff's questionnaire and the responses to Ofsted's pupils' questionnaire.

Inspection team

Stephanie Gill, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Rachel Goodwin	Her Majesty's Inspector
Elizabeth Haddock	Ofsted Inspector
Martin Hanbury	Ofsted Inspector

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