

Inspection of a good school: The Blue School

Kennion Road, Wells, Somerset BA5 2NR

Inspection dates:

17 and 18 May 2023

Outcome

The Blue School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

The Blue School's values of respect, empathy and politeness are understood by the whole school community. Pupils at the school benefit from warm and respectful relationships with their teachers. Teachers care deeply about pupils' academic progress and their well-being. Pupils appreciate the personal advice and guidance they receive about their learning and their futures. This means that pupils are happy and safe and they achieve well.

Pupils are proud to be part of the school's community. The school is inclusive. Many take part in the wide variety of clubs and activities on offer. There are many opportunities for pupil leadership in all year groups. Sixth-form students are good role models and enjoy supporting younger pupils. Bullying is not tolerated. Pupils have confidence that staff will resolve issues when they arise.

Leaders have ensured that the curriculum is broad and academically rigorous. This does not compromise a significant focus on creative and practical subjects. Pupils enjoy learning. Pupils learn about the wider world. They are well supported when it comes to making choices about their next steps.

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

Leaders have designed an ambitious curriculum. Pupils study a wide range of subjects at key stage 3. They have many opportunities to pursue their own interests. In nearly all subjects, leaders have given careful thought to when pupils learn important knowledge. This means that, most of the time, pupils build on and connect their prior learning. In some cases, pupils' understanding is not checked effectively before learning moves on. When this occurs, they do not benefit from the well-sequenced curriculum.

Most teachers present information clearly. They are skilful at showing pupils how something should be done. There is an ongoing drive to bring the most effective teaching practices into the classroom. As a result, pupils benefit from teachers' expertise.

Staff encourage pupils to have a love of reading. Younger pupils are given time to read for pleasure. Pupils who struggle with reading are supported to catch up. Leaders are beginning to ensure that these pupils get the right type of help.

Teachers have a good knowledge of pupils in their classes with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). This means teachers adapt the way they present information appropriately. The pastoral systems in the school ensure that pupils with SEND receive the support they need.

Low-level disruption rarely interrupts learning. When this does happen, there are systems in place to ensure that pupils do not disrupt others. There is a strong focus on rewards and building positive relationships.

Pupils are expected to behave well at social times. When pupils have raised concerns about others' behaviour, leaders have listened to them. They work with pupils to improve the systems that are in place.

Pupils' wider development sits at the heart of The Blue School's ethos. Many pupils take part in the wide range of clubs and activities on offer, including music lessons, sports teams and the school's annual drama production. Pupils, including those in the sixth form, talk enthusiastically about working with and mentoring pupils from other year groups. A large number of pupils take part in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, at all levels.

Pupils value the opportunities they have to discuss and debate. This supports their moral and cultural development. Numerous visits from external speakers and participation in workshops also support their learning about how to stay safe. Pupils remember important messages about healthy relationships.

Pupils receive detailed information and guidance about their next steps, including apprenticeships and help with university applications. Leaders ensure that pupils find suitable and aspirational destinations at the end of key stages 4 and 5

Leaders at all levels have created an ambitious and caring culture at the school. Staff feel proud to work here and are determined to do the best for the pupils in their care.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding. Leaders have ensured that safeguarding is 'everyone's business'. Adults and children have a good knowledge of local risks. Pupils all say they have a trusted adult in school. Staff are trained and understand how to report concerns. The members of the safeguarding team have a detailed knowledge of their roles and work tenaciously to secure the right support for the most vulnerable children. This includes effective partnerships with external agencies. For example, the police regularly visit the school to build positive relationships with young people.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Checks on what pupils have learned do not always identify gaps in pupils' knowledge, particularly in key stage 3. This hinders teachers' ability to address pupils' misconceptions or pick up on any missed learning. Leaders should support teachers to use appropriate assessment strategies to enable pupils to achieve well across the curriculum.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in October 2017.

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.

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	137285
Local authority	Somerset
Inspection number	10268641
Type of school	Secondary Comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,457
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	276
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Jennifer Warnock
Headteacher	Mark Woodlock
Website	www.theblueschoolwells.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	17 and 18 October 2017, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- This school is a larger-than-average comprehensive school.
- The school is a voluntary-controlled school in the Diocese of Bath and Wells.
- The Blue School leads the West Somerset Research School, which is part of the Research Schools Network.
- The school uses one registered alternative provision and eight unregistered alternative provisions for a small number of pupils.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 7 to 13 with information about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with senior staff, including those who oversee behaviour and curriculum.
- Inspectors met with the special educational needs coordinator and reviewed plans that support pupils with SEND.
- Inspectors met with the designated safeguarding lead, reviewed documentation related to safeguarding and referrals to the local authority. They also spoke to staff about how they keep pupils safe.
- Inspectors met with members of the board of trustees.
- On the first day, inspectors carried out deep dives in history, science, business, computing and design and technology. As part of this, they held discussions with senior leaders, subject leaders and teachers. They also talked to pupils about their learning and looked at work they had completed.
- Inspectors considered responses to Ofsted's online survey, Ofsted Parent View, and the views of staff and pupils in Ofsted's online survey.

Inspection team

Victoria Griffin, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Benjamin Houghton

Ofsted Inspector

Stuart Wilson

Ofsted Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2023