



Office for Standards  
in Education

## Inspection Report

### THE BLUE COAT SCHOOL

Unique Reference Number: 104704

LEA: Liverpool

Inspection Dates: 09 – 11 June 2004

Reporting Inspector: Michael Blaylock HMI

Inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996, and was  
deemed section 12 (3) under the same act

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## INTRODUCTION

The inspection was a pilot of the new arrangements for inspection announced by Ofsted in its consultation paper of February 2004. It was carried out with the support and co-operation of the staff of The Blue Coat School and of the local education authority.

The inspection was carried out by four of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an independent lay inspector.

### **Key for inspection grades:**

Grade 1	Very good
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Adequate
Grade 4	Not adequate

### **Description of the school**

The Blue Coat School is a grammar school with 868 students; 263 are in the sixth form of whom 57 are girls. Girls have been admitted into the sixth form for fifteen years and in 2002 the main school became co-educational with the admission of girls into Year 7. At the time of the inspection Years 7 and 8 were fully co-educational with approximately 70 boys and 50 girls in each year group. The school is oversubscribed attracting students from 200 primary schools in Liverpool and the surrounding area. It is the only grammar school within the Liverpool Local Education Authority and has a distinctive culture and rich history extending over almost 300 years.

## **Overall effectiveness of the school**

The Blue Coat School is a good and improving school. Most students make good progress and their personal development is good. High standards are achieved through effective teaching and the very good attitudes and good behaviour of the vast majority of students. Some departments are doing a very good job but this is not consistently so throughout the school. Students are safe and adequately cared for. The school's leadership and management are good: the school has been brought through a difficult period of change and the disruption associated with a three year building and refurbishment programme. In that time the school has become co-educational and standards have continued to rise. Parents are pleased with the provision offered. The school provides good value for money.

**Grade: 2**

## **Effectiveness of the school's sixth form**

The sixth form provision is adequate. Standards are high and students' progress is satisfactory. It was not possible to observe any sixth form teaching at the time of the inspection but results suggest that teaching is effective in enabling most students to achieve grades at A-level consistent with their performance at GCSE. However, some do not achieve as well as they should. The leadership and management of the sixth form are adequate. There is scope to improve how students are supported, including tracking systems, to ensure that all make good progress.

**Grade for sixth form: 3**

## **Improvement since the last inspection**

Improvement has been good although some of the key issues raised have only recently been addressed. The recently completed new build and refurbishment programme has enhanced the school premises significantly, but has also caused considerable disruption over the past three years. This limited the developments in some other areas, but, despite this, standards have risen. There is improved communication between the layers of management. Progress has been made in information communication technology (ICT) both in provision and staff training, although the school is aware of the need for further development in using ICT across the curriculum. Further work is also still needed to increase the variety of teaching and learning styles.

**Grade: 2**

## **Capacity to improve**

The school's self evaluation indicates an understanding of where improvement is needed. There are some strong leaders with the capacity to take the school forward. The evaluation procedures recently introduced have the potential to bring about further improvement.

**Grade: 2**

## **What the school should do to improve further**

The school should improve:

- the quality of teaching and learning to include a greater variety of styles and to meet the needs of all learners
- the quality assurance systems to enable senior staff and middle managers to consistently monitor and evaluate the work of the school thus providing a sharper focus for strategic planning
- the systems for tracking students' progress in the sixth form and for providing support to ensure that all students make good progress
- the allocation of time for staff to monitor the progress and personal development of the 11-16 year old students in the main school
- links with other educational institutions in order for staff and students to benefit from and contribute to the wider community.

## **ACHIEVEMENT AND STANDARDS**

Standards are high. Many students achieve the highest possible grades in national tests at age 14 and in public examinations at both GCSE and at A-level. Students make very good progress in Key Stage 3, where results in national tests are well above average, and the upward trend over recent years is above the national trend. In Key Stage 4, the results are in line with national averages for all grammar schools, and the improvement trend is broadly in line with the national trend. In some departments assessment data is used well to set targets and monitor students' progress. This is particularly effective in ICT where GCSE results are exceptional with 80% of pupils achieving grades A or A\* in 2003. A small number of Year 10 and 11 students fail to achieve their potential in some subjects. While the progress that students make in Key Stage 4 is satisfactory overall it is not as strong as the school suggests.

In the sixth form, results are well above national averages in most subjects with mathematics and chemistry consistently achieving high standards with large numbers of candidates in recent years. In 2003, approximately one fifth of students failed to achieve the grades expected, based on their GCSE performance. The progress that students make in the sixth form has improved over the last three years such that it is now in line with national averages.

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 3**

## **PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Personal development is good. The students respond very well to the strong tradition at The Blue Coat School, with its emphasis on the need to work hard to achieve academic success. They are proud, happy and content, enjoy school life and nearly always do their best to adhere to school rules and customs.

Students appreciate the opportunities they are given to learn about other cultures and the richness and diversity of modern society. They show respect for each other in lessons and are generally considerate of the needs of others. Students are developing spiritually through being given a variety of stimulating challenges in lessons that extend their thinking and understanding. The school's commitment to sport, performing arts and charitable work makes a distinctive contribution to fostering students' interests and enhancing their personal development.

Students are very keen to come to school and attendance is very good. This reflects well on the quality of the school's provision, particularly bearing in mind how far some students travel to attend. Students are confident and usually contribute enthusiastically to lessons and enjoy very good relationships with each other and their teachers. Most students behave very well and feel safe and free from intimidation. However, some mentioned taunting from their peers and others that some older students were aggressive to them and that this was not always picked up quickly enough by staff. A recent survey of students' views undertaken by the school indicates similar concerns. For these reasons, inspectors judge that personal development is good, not very good as suggested by the school.

**Grade: 2**

## **QUALITY OF PROVISION**

Inspectors agree with the school that the quality of its provision is good.

Teaching is good. Most lessons seen were of a good standard, and the scrutiny of students' work shows that provision has been consistently good over time. Students respond well to teachers' high expectations, and consequently most reach consistently high standards in their work. Planning and deployment of learning resources are generally good, and very good relationships characterise most lessons. Some progress has been made towards the school's intention to develop a variety of teaching and learning strategies. Examples were seen of good practice in dialogue between teacher and students, group work and student self-evaluation. In weaker lessons, activities were not planned to provide for students' learning needs, and teachers did not use effective methods of engaging all students in discussion. Students cited examples of inspiring teaching in some subjects, but also confirmed the inspection evidence that some teaching is dull and uninspiring.

Assessment of students' progress is adequate, and is now providing them with challenging academic targets which are based firmly on prior attainment data and assume good progress. Termly assessments are shared with students and parents, and the school is developing good supportive systems to intervene where concerns are revealed. Some departments systematically provide detailed guidance on written work to help students improve. For example this has been a significant factor in rising standards in ICT. In design technology, students use examination board criteria to assess their own, and each others draft coursework, thereby gaining a secure understanding of subject requirements. In some other subjects, whilst students know how well they are doing they are less clear about what they should do to improve.

Students with individual educational needs spoke very highly of the care and support they receive. However, the school does not explicitly monitor the achievement of different groups. The impact of the new co-educational provision in Years 7 and 8 has not been systematically analysed. The annual departmental reviews of performance have begun to influence curriculum change, which is bringing about improved achievement in Years 10 and 11.

The curriculum is essentially academic, and reflects parents' expectations. There is a limited range of curriculum choice at Years 10 and 11 with no opportunity to study applied subjects despite government initiatives to increase the flexibility of provision for students aged 14 to 19. This limits the effectiveness of the school in meeting its aim in respect of students' needs in a 'rapidly changing technological society'. Nevertheless, students of all ages expressed broad satisfaction with their curriculum. Extra-curricular enrichment activities provide a wide range of recreational, sporting and cultural opportunities that students can take part in at lunchtimes, as well as out of school hours. These include a number of residential experiences.

The school offers good guidance, advice and support for its students. However the way it cares for them is adequate overall, because there are some weaknesses. Parents and students hold positive views about welfare arrangements. For example, a number of young students were very pleased with the school's induction arrangements. There are suitable procedures for first aid and child protection, understood by all staff. The students generally feel safe, especially when directly supervised by an adult, and know routines well. The school acknowledges, however, that more attention needs to be given to pastoral arrangements. The time devoted to registration periods is very short and prevents form tutors from effectively monitoring their students' academic progress and personal development. Most year group managers are active in supporting students in their activities throughout the school but some students would like to see a greater involvement from their year heads. Sixth form students' progress is not tracked carefully enough to give early warning of those in danger of underachieving.

**Grade: 2**

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

Leadership and management are good. The head teacher, governors and senior management team provide a clear direction for the school. They set high expectations and accurately identify priorities for improvement. Staff are committed to the school and its academic focus. A revised management structure, regular staff meetings and daily bulletins along with an open door policy of senior managers have significantly improved communications since the last inspection.

Senior managers' evaluations have correctly identified the school's strengths and where it might do better. Achievement data are analysed and used to set targets for individual students based on their prior attainment and whole school targets at each key stage. However, the data are not used to measure the performance of different groups of students, for example, boys and girls. Heads of department effectively review the examination results of their subject but do not monitor and evaluate teaching and learning regularly enough. Too many departments tend to work in isolation and there are few ways to share good practice with colleagues, although there are recent moves to encourage greater collaboration to improve provision. This tendency to isolation is also true of the school's relationships with other educational institutions.

The school development plan is clearly focused on standards and students' experience at school, but there are few measurable targets or success criteria. The equal opportunities policy, which includes both gender and race equality policies, has recently been updated but this has not yet been approved by governors. The staffing is well matched to the needs of the school's strong academic curriculum. There are adequate arrangements for staff induction, performance management and professional development but the school does not link the planning of staff development well enough to its priorities for improvement.

Accommodation is good and provides a welcoming and stimulating learning environment following the significant rebuild and refurbishment programme. Resources are used well but some students say they find it hard to find a free computer to do their work. The school expenditure per student is slightly lower than the national average, and, given the high standards achieved by students, it offers good value for money.

**Grade: 2**

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