



Blenheim High School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 131386
Local Authority Surrey
Inspection number 293745
Inspection dates 21–22 February 2007
Reporting inspector Bill Stoneham

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

Type of school	Comprehensive	School address	Longmead Road
School category	Foundation		Epsom
Age range of pupils	11–19		KT19 9BH
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01372 745333
Number on roll (school)	1246	Fax number	01372 745345
Number on roll (6th form)	173		
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr Roger Kitley
		Headteacher	Ms Teresa Leech
Date of previous school inspection	12 March 2001		

Age group 11–19	Inspection dates 21–22 February 2007	Inspection number 293745
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by five Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Blenheim High School is a larger than average specialist science college located in Epsom, Surrey. The school was first established in 1997, when only Year 7 students attended. It has grown rapidly since this time in terms of both numbers and popularity. Most students are from favourable socio-economic circumstances, with a below average entitlement to free school meals. The student population is largely of White British heritage. Very few students have a first language other than English. A below average percentage of students have learning difficulties and disabilities.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Blenheim High School is a good school with many outstanding features. Outstanding leadership from the headteacher, ably supported by a strong leadership team and an outstanding governing body, offers clear drive and direction to the school's work. The senior staff and governors know their school very well. They are aware of its many strengths but, equally, they know where developments are needed. The school's self-evaluation is detailed and thorough. Significant progress has been made since the last inspection and there is an excellent capacity to improve further.

Students enter the school in Year 7 with standards that are marginally above the national average. By the end of Year 11 standards are above average and higher than expected based on pupils' previous work. Progress is most rapid in Years 7, 8 and 9; it is slower in Years 10 and 11, where the pace of progress could be faster. Overall most students, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities, achieve well. Students achieve very well in a number of subjects, including drama, design and technology, geography and German. Standards are above average and achievement is good in English and science. There have been some recent staffing difficulties in mathematics, which have slowed progress. Staffing is now more settled and standards are rising again.

Most students like the school and are very good ambassadors for it; they are proud of what is offered. They feel safe and they know that the school places a strong emphasis on promoting healthy life-styles. Success and personal endeavour are encouraged, rewarded and celebrated. There are many opportunities for the students to accept responsibility and their commitment to charitable causes is impressive. Most students enjoy attending school and attendance is rising. A very large number of parents replied to the pre-inspection questionnaire. The overwhelming majority expressed much pleasure in the school's work. A significant number of parents had reservations about the school's lunchtime arrangements believing them to be rushed. These arrangements had in part been changed following student consultation but the school acknowledges that the situation is not ideal and is monitoring it. Most parents hold the school in very high regard and are hugely supportive of the school's work in all its forms.

The students benefit from the good teaching provided. As the school has grown, it has been necessary to appoint many new staff. The school has been very successful in appointing many highly accomplished staff, many of whom are new to teaching and add much vitality to the school. New staff are offered considerable support. The school's monitoring of teaching and learning is outstanding and contributes to the students' progress. In some lessons there are insufficient opportunities for independent learning and there are some inconsistencies in marking and planning. These factors serve to restrict progress. The good curriculum is enhanced and enlivened by an extensive range of very well supported extra-curricular activities. The school's specialist science status has resulted in some interesting and successful curriculum changes. Science provision in Years 10 and 11 has been increased and there are now more opportunities in mathematics, especially for higher attaining students.

The care, guidance and support offered to the students are outstanding. Each student is valued as an individual and staff are exceptionally keen to see each student develop to their full potential in both academic and personal terms.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Sixth form provision is good. It is led and managed in a demanding, yet sensitive, way by an excellent head of sixth form. Students enter the sixth form with below average levels of prior attainment but leave with results that are broadly average. Achievement is good and the school's success in its A Level work is improving year-on-year. The curriculum is good. It meets the needs of the students well and is being improved so that more vocational options will be available during the next academic year. There is a good range of extra-curricular activities. There are also good opportunities for the students to take responsibility and assume leadership roles. Many students contribute well to school and community events, for example through their commitment to the Surrey Graduation Certificate programme.

The students gain much enjoyment from entering the sixth form. They are good role models for the rest of the school; they are rapidly developing a good range of relevant academic and work-related skills. The support and encouragement they enjoy is excellent and students new to the school, though small in number, are made welcome and settle quickly. The sixth form has only been in operating since September 2002, but it is growing in strength and numbers. There is a clear strategy for how it should grow and recognition that there is scope for standards to improve further. Teaching is good and this is helping standards to rise. Attendance is good and course retention rates are excellent. The majority of students respond positively because they respect their teachers. They are keen to do well, in part, to repay their teaching staff for their support, encouragement and commitment.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards and achievement ensure that all teaching is sufficiently challenging.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Achievement is good and most students make good progress because the school provides them with challenging targets and closely monitors their progress in partnership with parents and with the students themselves. Students come to the school with standards that are slightly above average. They make very good progress in the first three years of school, culminating in high overall scores in the examinations taken at the end of Year 9. More students gain the highest grades in these examinations than in the country as a whole. All groups of pupils, including those with disabilities and learning difficulties, make good progress. Boys and girls make equally good progress.

The pace of improvement has been less marked in Years 10 and 11 where students make satisfactory progress and all groups progress at a similar rate. In general GCSE results are above the national average and represent satisfactory progress from pupils' starting points. There is evidence of a rising trend, and more pupils are achieving five or more A* to C passes, including English and mathematics, than is the case in the country as a whole. Students who were educated fully at the school do even better. Students do well in a number of subjects, and the school's specialist status as a science college is reflected in its strong performance in the sciences.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Students' personal development is outstanding. Their spiritual, moral and social development is particularly strong. This is seen in their excellent attitudes to learning and the strong, harmonious relationships that exist between most students and between staff and students. Though there is an excellent focus on students' all round cultural development it does not always reflect the diverse aspects of society. Behaviour is very good. Attendance is satisfactory, being broadly in line with the national average, and is improving. Students greatly enjoy their education, particularly the wide variety of activities offered. Students feel safe. The very few bullying or racist incidents are quickly and effectively dealt with. One student said, 'A strength of the school is that we have a really close relationship with our tutor'. Students eat healthily at school and a recent survey showed that the vast majority take part in sport or leisure activities. Students are actively involved in both the school and the wider community. They offer considerable support for many charities, lead assemblies and act as impressive ambassadors for the school. The effective school council gives students the opportunity to express their views and improve the life of the school. The careers programme and the curriculum both ensure that students are afforded good opportunities to develop their future economic prospects.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teaching and learning are good, with some lessons being outstanding. There is a rigorous programme of monitoring teaching and the school has a very good understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. This enables senior staff to target support at helping all teachers deliver good lessons. Lesson planning, the use of a range of learning activities and teachers' willingness to work together to share good practice are all strengths. Students report that teachers work hard to make lessons interesting and, for the most part, behaviour and attitudes are very good. In most

lessons, teachers start lessons by explaining what students are expected to learn and they maintain a good pace of work. Some teaching is not always sufficiently targeted at students' differing needs. Where lessons are less strong, there is less challenge, students are too dependent on their teachers for their learning and their progress slows. Teachers have a very good understanding of how to assess students' progress, though the school has identified some minor inconsistencies in the quality of marking, which are being addressed. Although teaching assistants provide good support, there is a need to plan more effectively for their work in some lessons to ensure that their skills are fully utilised. Parents are kept well informed about their child's progress and encouraged to be involved in their child's education.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum which ensures clear routes for students to follow as they pass through the school and into the sixth form. In Years 10 and 11 the school makes every effort to personalise the curriculum to fit the different needs of its students. This means that some students have the opportunity to follow vocational courses offered in collaboration with the local college, whilst others are able to take certain GCSE examinations early. Specialist science status has helped the school to raise overall standards and ensures that science is given a high profile. More able students are encouraged to study the three separate sciences in Years 10 and 11, whilst in mathematics students are able to start their AS courses early. The school rightly recognises the need to extend the range of vocational courses which it currently offers. Citizenship is taught as part of the personal, social and health education programme but there is insufficient time to ensure that all aspects are covered in depth. The range of extension and extra-curricular activities is very extensive and much appreciated by students. The school gives a high priority to extending cultural awareness with trips to places such as Prague and Ecuador, as well as visits to museums and galleries. In addition there is a huge range of clubs, such as the chamber choir, girls' rugby and whole school drama productions.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The care guidance and support of students are outstanding. Academic monitoring is especially well managed. Data is dynamically used to ensure that teachers and students can closely track individual progress and identify any opportunity to provide additional support. Students are acutely aware of their personal targets and appreciate the regular academic review days which help them to reach their fullest potential. They are further supported by good quality careers advice and guidance.

Child protection, health and safety together with risk assessment procedures are extremely robust. They are clear, comprehensive and consistently applied across every

aspect of life at the school. Students are emphatic in praising what the school does to support them whenever they face difficulty. One student volunteered 'I would always feel more comfortable discussing a personal problem with someone in the school than I could at home. I know that my teachers will give me real help and support to sort it out'. Additionally, external counsellors regularly come into the school to assist students in dealing with any issues. The provision of care is successfully extended in the sixth form where, for example, visitors from the Fire Service and the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency discuss safe driving with students.

Concerns raised by some parents during the inspection are being examined by the appropriate bodies.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Leadership and management are outstanding. The headteacher, ably supported by her deputies, provides inspirational leadership. As a result all leaders and managers feel valued. They are part of a team sharing the headteacher's vision of a school in which each individual can succeed. Senior staff and governors have identified the strengths of the school and they are very aware of where further improvements are needed and they are applying appropriate remedies. They have also put into practice systems designed to bring out the best in all teachers and teaching assistants, so that they can all share in driving the school forward. The 'can do' ethos of the school means that strategies for improvement are quickly and thoughtfully put into place with the co-operation of the entire staff. The specialist status of the school as a science college enables new initiatives to take place to benefit the whole school.

The outstanding governing body shares the school's commitment to learning, and to promoting the excellent personal development, care and guidance of students. The quality of the school's self-evaluation is excellent, and focuses on using as much information as possible to fuel improvements. The impact of the leadership is seen in the calm, purposeful ethos of the school and in its commitment to working in partnership with outside organisations. All these measures have resulted in the school's deservedly high reputation locally.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	2
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	3	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	1	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

My colleagues and I would like to thank you for the help you gave us during our recent inspection visit. We were all impressed with your school; it is a good school with many outstanding features. We believe that the school, including the sixth form, is excellently led and managed. You are taught well and the curriculum opportunities offered to you are also good. Levels of academic and pastoral care are excellent and there is an outstanding provision for your personal development and well-being.

Though academic standards in the school are above average overall and are rising, we have concluded that the rate of improvement could be faster, especially in Years 10 and 11. We are, therefore, asking senior staff and governors to look at further improving the quality of teaching by ironing out inconsistencies. Our development point for the school is:

- raise standards and achievement further so that all teaching matches the level of the best.

Many of you told us how much you like the school and we were impressed by your behaviour and attitudes. You are good ambassadors for the school's work.

Thank you again for being so welcoming and best wishes to you all in your future endeavours.

Bill Stoneham Lead inspector