



The Blue School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 123892
Local Authority Somerset
Inspection number 294791
Inspection dates 17–18 January 2007
Reporting inspector Peter Limm HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive	School address	Kennion Road
School category	Voluntary controlled		Wells
Age range of pupils	11–18		BA5 2NR
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01749 678799
Number on roll (school)	1491	Fax number	01749 836215
Number on roll (6th form)	210		
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Peter Spencer
		Headteacher	Stephen Jackson
Date of previous school inspection	1 March 2000		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–18	17–18 January 2007	294791

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The Blue School is a popular, oversubscribed school with a large sixth form. The school achieved specialist science college status in 2003. The school has relatively few students from minority ethnic backgrounds. The proportions of students with learning difficulties and with a statement of special educational need are broadly average. The school serves the city of Wells and surrounding villages, an area that is generally advantaged. The intake ranges from families based in isolated rural and agricultural hamlets to those choosing to live in the satellite villages around Wells and commute to work in Bath and Bristol.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

The Blue School is providing an outstanding quality of education. One parent went as far as to say 'this is a fabulous school'. The school prides itself on maximising individual student development and achievement and a parent reflected the views of many when she said 'my child is receiving an all-round education which I believe will stand him in good stead out in the real world'. The students confirmed these views wholeheartedly. They spoke very appreciatively of their hardworking teachers and the additional support they receive when needed. Students are keen to succeed and work hard. Standards are consistently very high in Key Stage 3 and in the sixth form and students make excellent progress. Standards are high in Key Stage 4 but here there is scope to improve the achievement of some less able students. Teaching and learning are good with many outstanding features, especially at Key Stage 3 and in the sixth form. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and clearly aim for high standards. The personal development of students is excellent thanks to a wide range of extended curriculum opportunities, high levels of student participation in school and community life and active intervention by the school on healthy eating. The school has benefited enormously from its science college status and the curriculum has been enriched as a consequence. The alternative pathways for students requiring a work related curriculum are good and the school works extremely well with other local schools and colleges to ensure that students are able to follow appropriate courses elsewhere if needed. However, it is aware that further curriculum provision is required for some less able students. The behaviour of students is good, their attitudes and motivation to learn are very strong and the vast majority enjoys school life. The school cares extremely well for its learners, with a shared and very strong commitment by staff to ensure that the more vulnerable and least motivated students fully benefit and engage in learning. Leadership and management of the headteacher and his team are outstanding. They have established a dynamic culture of regular monitoring and evaluation at departmental level, and this ensures that all staff feel part of a team contributing to students' achievement and well-being. Leaders at all levels share a passionate commitment to the school. The headteacher has an inspiring vision for the school, seeking to provide the best all-round education for students. Potential innovations are researched thoroughly. School development planning and self-evaluation are excellent and focused tightly on key areas for improvement. The governors discharge their responsibilities extremely well and ensure that their active support is balanced by highly effective challenge on key issues. The school has responded very well to the previous inspection and its capacity to improve is excellent.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 1

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form is outstanding. There is highly effective support and monitoring of students' achievement and the consistently excellent quality of teaching supports students in reaching very high standards both at AS and A level. This has been sustained over a long period of time. Links with other post-16 providers

offer ample opportunities for students to follow alternative pathways at other institutions if necessary.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the teaching and curriculum provision for the small minority of students whose achievement in Key Stage 4 is not as high as it could be.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

Overall standards are well above average, and achievement is good. In the sixth form, standards are extremely high and achievement is outstanding, particularly for those students following vocational courses. At the end of Key Stage 3, overall standards attained in national tests for English, mathematics and science are significantly above the national average. Students enter the school in Year 7 with standards that are broadly average and over the key stage all students make outstanding progress. There is significant strength in mathematics where standards and achievement have been sustained at the highest level for several years. Whilst many students sustain good progress during Key Stage 4, some, particularly less able students, do not. In spite of this, achievement is still good overall, and for the great majority of students standards are well above average with the proportion of students who attain five or more GCSE grades A*–C being significantly above the national average for the past two years. Higher attaining students do very well. Points scores for students' best eight subjects have been well above average for the past four years. The overall pass rate for GCSE examinations is above average with the great majority of students achieving success at GCSE. In the sixth form the majority of students follow courses leading to GCE A-level qualifications. Standards are consistently well above average and there has been a steady trend of improvement in overall points scores for the past three years. In 2005 these were exceptionally high, representing outstanding achievement by this cohort of students. Whilst not as strong, the picture of high standards has been sustained in 2006.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The personal development of students is outstanding. Students take up the abundant opportunities offered to them to grow as compassionate young people able to lead a healthy and rewarding life. They develop very clear values, showing very high levels of care for each other and for the community in which they live. Many students join the school council, which brings together large numbers of like-minded students who wish to make a real difference to their school surroundings, the lives of others, their future educational and economic possibilities, and many more aspects of the life of

the school. The council provides opportunities for students to express their enterprising as well as caring sides and many of their achievements have been nationally recognised. Students speak eloquently about the chances they have to take ownership of projects, to take risks and to make a difference to the lives of others. The council has overseen the drive towards more healthy living, for instance it has helped to refurbish bike sheds so that students can cycle to school. Students throughout the school clearly enjoy their education, including the many enrichment activities offered to them, such as school productions and artistic and many sporting challenges. Students gain excellent knowledge of their own culture and that of many other places in the world. Attendance at school is satisfactory and the school's support systems ensure that students who have been absent do not miss out on important learning experiences. Students behave very well around the extensive school site and regardless of physical or academic ability engage well with the school's inclusive ethos. Students feel secure that any incidents of bullying are quickly dealt with and they enjoy very close relationships with their tutors. The pastoral care offered by the school is outstanding and students respond through the respect they show to teachers, to each other and by developing as respectful and wellrounded individuals.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

The quality of teaching and learning is good in Years 7 to 11 with many outstanding aspects, especially at Key Stage 3. Teaching is excellent in the sixth form. In a typical lesson, the teacher's excellent subject knowledge enables them to explain concepts and facts very clearly, with good use of digital interactive whiteboards. Lessons often have good pace and high challenge and students generally respond very well. Planning is very good, so that materials are of a high quality, and activities are well organised and managed. The school has focused well on improving the range of teaching styles and students generally find lessons rewarding and a good basis for learning. At Key Stage 4, however, lower attaining students do not have a sufficiently stimulating learning experience to enable them to progress as well as other students. Sixth form students benefit extremely well from lessons that are intellectually challenging and stimulating. Relationships between students and teachers are often excellent. Marking is generally good and provides students with helpful information on their level of achievement and how to improve. Excellent assessment data are collected and collated extremely well so that teachers have a full understanding of the progress that their students are making and in most cases effective interventions are made where students are not meeting targets.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

The curriculum is good for Years 7 to 11 and outstanding in the sixth form. It meets the needs of the majority of individuals very well. Gifted and talented students enjoy an excellent range of additional out of school activities as well as challenging opportunities in top sets, including some accelerated examination courses. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities are offered excellent support in the basic skills of numeracy and literacy in the earlier years, followed by a range of work related and vocational options in Years 10 and 11. However, a number of less able students in Key Stage 4 do not have sufficient opportunities to embark on these vocational pathways. For those for whom GCSE is appropriate, the option system in Key Stage 4 offers an excellent range of choices. Provision for personal and social education and health and safety is very well organised and delivered effectively through a series of specially devised events. The curriculum in the sixth form meets the aptitudes and needs of students extremely well, providing a very wide range of AS- and A-level courses and a few vocational A-level courses. Science is promoted extremely well and is very popular. There is also an excellent range of clubs and visits out of school including many abroad. The provision for sporting activities contributes extremely well to the students' capacity to stay safe and healthy.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The school keeps careful records of the results of its widespread and thorough assessment of students' work. Teachers use this information to inform the way they plan their lessons and courses and to set challenging targets for their students. The school has developed a superb range of systems to record achievement and make it openly available to students, parents and teachers and this now means that everyone involved in the education of a student has a clear view of how they are progressing. There are excellent systems for planning and risk assessing trips and visits. Recruitment of all staff is very carefully monitored and safeguarding procedures are highly effective and up to date for all staff. The health and safety of all individuals on the school site is paramount for the school. Students with particular learning difficulties and disabilities are supported extremely well and helped to achieve their best by an outstanding department. Many make excellent progress in acquiring social and academic skills that enable some to remain in full-time education. Those for whom indifferent behaviour is an issue are supported by a unit that makes a notable difference to their lives. Gifted and talented students are clearly identified and are offered excellent chances to extend their education through focused theme days and outside activities.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Leadership and management are outstanding. The school is extremely well led by the headteacher, who is respected by staff, students and parents. He is deeply committed to securing excellence in every aspect of the school's work. The senior leadership team plays a key role in managing improvements and sustaining high quality provision. The team has a comprehensive oversight of strengths and weaknesses in subject departments. Specialist science status has been very well led and managed. Skilful management and development of the school's workforce has enabled the headteacher to create an excellent support team structure throughout the school. This structure is led very well by an excellent business manager whose contribution to financial planning and resource development has been invaluable in enabling the school to improve its accommodation and have exciting and sustainable development plans for the future. The school's highly effective improvement planning is based on a secure evaluation of performance data in every area of operation. The governing body is highly effective, providing a good balance of support and challenge for the school. It uses its excellent expertise most effectively to ensure that school plans and developments are appropriately secure before approving them.

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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?	1	1
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
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	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	1
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	1	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	3	
How well learners enjoy their education	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	1	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	1
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	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	
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

Thank you for your positive contributions during our visit to your school recently. We learnt a great deal from talking with you and the staff, and joining your lessons and other activities. You spoke to us articulately, confidently and openly. You clearly know your school well, and are rightly proud of its excellent provision for your education. We were delighted to see that so many of you are thriving at The Blue School. We agree with your comments, and the views of your teachers and most of your parents, that The Blue School is an outstanding school. Your examination results are impressive. You are taught well and you appreciate your teachers' expertise and subject knowledge. You have excellent opportunities to study a wide range of subjects and pursue many additional interests in the school's out-of-hours activities. The headteacher, senior team and governing body work very hard to make sure you have the best all-round education possible – and you work hard too. There has been much improved accommodation since the last inspection and more is planned. Since no school can be perfect, we have asked the headteacher to raise achievement for those of you in Key Stage 4 who find GCSE courses difficult and who do not make as much progress as your fellow students.